

“Perfect Timing”

St. Luke begins his Gospel telling us that “many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us...” and, then, “...it seemed good to me also...to write an orderly account...” Luke is very concerned to set the story of Jesus into the historical time of the 1st century. So, Luke tells us of the beginning, in the days of Herod, King of Judea, when Caesar Augustus was the Emperor of the Roman Empire, and we learn of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus.

Some years later, specifically “in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberias Caesar, Pontius Pilate being the Governor of Judea,” John the Baptist is preaching and baptizing in Judea, in the region of the Jordan River, and Jesus is baptized by John, thus beginning Our Lord’s ministry, as we hear in today’s Gospel.

Luke has a very clear understanding of our God acting in human history. Perhaps Luke knew that famous proclamation from 300-400 years earlier in the Book of Ecclesiastes (3:1-15):

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... a time to be born, and a time to die... a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted... a time to break down, and a time to build up... a time to mourn and a time to laugh...”

We could add a time for snow and a time for sun... a time for work and a time to play... a time for our favorite team to win and a time for them to lose... Perhaps you have heard of the three most important considerations in real estate: location, location, location. I have often thought the three most important concerns for life, especially the journey of faith; are timing, timing, timing...

Jesus knew it was time to go to Judea and be baptized by John. St. Luke gives us two possible reasons why the time was right for Jesus, but they are left out of today’s appointed Gospel. In verses 18-20 of chapter 3, Luke tells us that Herod had John arrested and put in prison. Surely Jesus knew that John could not long avoid Herod’s attention. Surely Jesus knew John didn’t have much time left. It was the right time for Jesus to go to John.

And, in the very next verse after verse 22, where today’s reading ends, Luke tells us Jesus began his ministry when he was about 30 years old. Perhaps Joseph had died. Maybe he had younger brothers who could care for Mary and the family. Then, as now, 30 is fairly old to be starting out on your own, beginning a profession, launching out from your family of origin, discovering and using your God-given gifts.

Some have questioned why Jesus wanted to be baptized. Luke doesn’t say much about Jesus’ motivation – only the timing. In Matthew’s account Jesus tells John that this Baptism is to “fulfill all righteousness...” (3:15). Perhaps this was Jesus’ way to affirm the Baptist’s ministry. Perhaps Jesus saw this as a new start to his own life and work. Perhaps it was because his own mother, Mary, had gone to John’s mother, Elizabeth, to confirm the mysterious announcement that begins the birth stories.

Jesus shared in the action of John’s baptisms. John’s disciples were concerned about many going to Jesus to be baptized. John told them, “He must increase, but I must decrease... this joy of mine is now full...” (John 3:22-30). Jesus also gave his disciples the Great Commission before his Ascension, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them...” Baptism begins our life in the Church, for many of us, our journey of faith. And so, we celebrate Jesus’ baptism as we consider our own baptisms, as we renew our Baptismal Promises today, as we begin this new calendar year, and

reflect upon our own individual ministries and work, as well as the corporate ministry we share at Grace Church for the year ahead.

What time is it for each of us? What season of life, season of faith do we experience as the calendar year 2019 begins? Are we motivated to make some new start, as Jesus started his ministry after his baptism? Have we lived fully into our baptismal promises? What work do we have to do?

This is an exciting time, an exciting season; for us at Grace Church, for each of us individually. This last week we marked the death of our parishioner, a Priest of the Church for more than 54 years, Fr. Jack Weise. Just three days later we celebrated the first baptism in our parish for 2019. Next Sunday, we give thanks for our Altar Guild and mark the transition from our Christmas President, Mary Toler, to our Easter President, Sherryl Dodd. And in two weeks, we will hold our Annual Meeting and elect seven new vestry members. This is a perfect time to give thanks to God, to renew our baptismal promises, to look forward to the year ahead!