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Title: *It's Time*

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Well, good morning. A special Happy Independence Day weekend. A special welcome to those watching online, at the Strip District, and in Butler. Let me also add my thanks and gratitude for being able to do what we're doing here this morning, worshipping, investigating, singing, and that we get to live in the freest country in the history of the world.

And I don't want to take for granted that privilege and those who have made and are making that possible. Would you join me in a word of prayer? And as we pray this morning, would you pray for yourself that God would speak to you directly as to what you need to hear today? And would you also pray for me that the Holy Spirit would give me the words that we need to hear this morning?

Would you join me in prayer? Father God, I pray that every single one of us would see and experience Jesus Christ this morning. Father, whatever may be heavy on our hearts and minds today, I pray that you will remove all distractions. I pray that each of us would be able to hear clearly and see clearly just who Jesus is today. Father, I pray that you would give me the words that all of us need to hear today, that we want not just to hear your Word this morning, but be doers of it as well. And we ask and pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. W

Well, I think about that first Independence Day and what that must have been like in 1776. The urgency of the moment, the freedom with which Americans fought for their own freedom, and the backbone of which still exists in this country today. And that really was a historical moment, certainly for American history, but also world history.

There was an urgency in that time, and I can't help but think that we are living in maybe such a time as this where there is an urgency to this moment. And it's because of that that I want to look at an urgent message that Jesus had that he began his public ministry with.

And I want you to think back to when you were a kid, if your parents had a really urgent or important message for you and your siblings, what did that process look like? This didn't happen often in our household, but my brother and I would be taken into the living room. The parents would sit on the couch and we were asked to sit on the couch.

And it was in those moments that we realized, okay, something coming here is important. We better be ready. And that's what was happening here. In Mark, chapter one, Jesus had just spent 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. And he enters Galilee and he has a special message. John the Baptist, who is the forerunner, a prophet of God, preparing the way for Jesus, has been thrown into prison because he has been speaking out about the incestuous relationship with Herod.

And so here comes Jesus' message. And this is what we read. In Mark one, Mark opens his gospel with these words, "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." And when you hear that phrase, the beginning of the good news, I wonder how many of us are out there today thinking, man, we could use some good news.

There's a lot of bad news right now just in the country, in the world, really. And there seems to be a lot going wrong. I mean, the economy is rough. Inflation is happening. Everything is expensive and hard to get. This is just my personal take, but customer service appears to be at an all-time low. But that's probably because customers are at an all-time low.

We're still reeling from a global pandemic. Major wars are being fought across the world. Racial divide is still fierce. I think we've never been farther away in terms of political differences. There are Supreme Court rulings, justices, and anger over abortion laws, a ton of anxiety and stress, not to mention whatever you and your family may be going through, and whatever difficulties that may be going on internally or in your own family.

And it is hard. And so, you may ask the question today, does anybody have any good news? And that's where Jesus comes in. Jesus steps up in Mark one. He says I don't just have good news, I have the best news. I have great news. And here it is in verse 15. Here's the urgent message right here. He said, "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'"

The Kingdom of God is the rule or the reign of God. It's the way things ought to be. It's the way things are in heaven as they are coming down to earth. And so, the reason that the kingdom is here, God says, is because Jesus, the king is here.

And for every person who receives Jesus as the king or the ruler of their lives, the Kingdom of God is present. And by the way, that kingdom is still in the process of coming for every person or family that comes to faith in Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is at our doorstep. The Kingdom of God is among us. It's inside of us. And Jesus

and God also promised that one day the Kingdom will come in fullness when every wrong will be made right. And so, Jesus has come bringing the Kingdom of God. And Jesus says the time has come. And when you hear the word time, I wonder what you think of. I mean, what is time? How do we measure time anyway?

When I was a kid, when I was younger, I got kind of annoyed with people who were older than me, saying just how time goes so fast. I mean, when you're two and three and four and one year goes by, that's like half your life. And so, you're like, wow, time is not really flying. But now I get it. When you're 20 or 30 or 50 or 80, one year is just one small portion of your life. And while the days may be long, the years seem to go by so quickly, so short. We all have the same amount of time, by the way.

And there are two words for time in Greek. The first is "Chronos" where we get the word chronology, and that's simply the calendar time. And every one of us has the same amount of time in a given day, 24 hours every day, 365 days a year. And it's what we do with that time, how we use it, utilize it, waste it, invest it. All of us are given that time.

But there's another word that Jesus uses for time here in Mark chapter one, and that's the word "Kairos." And this word means an appointed time, an urgent or a special or a divine time of God in history. And you think about significant moments, maybe in the history of this country, like Independence Day or September 11th.

And God comes along, Jesus comes along and says, this is the time. It's used to describe a special moment in history where at other times God says He will use this time of a day of judgment when he will close all of history. The Apostle Paul in Second Corinthians Chapter six used this word to describe the urgency of the moment, to make a decision to follow Jesus. And He said this I tell you, now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation.

And so, the reason that the time is finally now is that the King is here now. Now, you and I may feel like those people in the first century. There were those people who were followers of God who wondered where in the world was God?

God had promised in the Old Testament He was going to send a messiah. He was going to send a ruler. He was going to send a savior. And then for about a period of 400 years, there was seeming silence, just where was God? Where is God? There were no scriptures being written. There were the prophets were few and far between.

And so, if you've ever had that moment, where is God? Like the time is now and God is supposed to show up, but I haven't experienced that. That's not been my experience to feel and see God, and the people in the first century knew that exact same thing. And yet it was just that moment. And though God is sometimes seemingly slow from our perspective, God is never late. He's exactly on time. And it was in that moment and time when the time had fully come that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. And this is where Jesus begins His public ministry.

I sense, and again, I'm no future telling prophet, I'm certainly no historian, but I have a sense that there is a similar sense of urgency in the world and country in which we live at this moment. Certainly, COVID has changed the way the world operates, perhaps forever. There are things happening in our country right now that are watershed moments, and I think I and the church might be remiss if we passed over one of those moments.

Several days ago, the Supreme Court ruling overturned Roe versus Wade. And we wanted to take just a moment as a church community to address this delicate issue. And if you've been around Orchard Hill any length of time, what you've probably experienced is that Orchard Hill is not a political church. And what we mean by that is we're not always chasing headlines. We're not having statements about the latest headlines that are going on around the world and around the country. And it's our hope and prayer that if you experience Orchard Hill in any way, whether you're a staunch Republican or a staunch Democrat or an independent or someone who can't stand politics, this really would be a place that you could come and investigate and check out faith at your own pace.

And so, with that being said, we felt, given the weight of this moment, that to not make any statement would be in a way to make a statement. And so, I wanted to take just a moment, a pastoral moment in this message, as a church to address the heart of God on this issue. And just as I say that I understand that maybe for some of us, our heart starts racing a little bit. Like Brady, I've had enough of that on the news. I've had enough of that on my social media feed. I've had enough conversations with friends and family. I don't want to hear one more word about it, much less from a pastor, much less from a white male pastor, frankly. And I understand that, because who am I to make any sort of statement about another person's body or choice?

And I also know how close to home this issue is for many of us. And I know that there are men who have persuaded and women who have regretfully and reluctantly and painfully undergone abortions. And I know that this topic brings up a lot of pain and guilt for some of us. And in fact, we also know that 76% of moms who are seeking abortions say that they would prefer to parent if only their life circumstances were different.

I also know today that there are those who are listening, who are considering abortion because they believe it's the only option. And there is great fear and anxiety and dread over what carrying a baby to full term will mean for them, their family, and ultimately that child. I know there are also those who are in favor of keeping abortions accessible, affordable, and legal for all at any point in time.

And the very thought that a politician or a justice or a pastor would take away a woman's right to choose what she does with her own body is abhorrent, sexist, and an assault on her freedom. But as a church that desires to honor the Lord and love all people well wherever they are, especially the vulnerable and those without a voice we wanted to speak about this matter as the very heart of God for people on all sides of this issue.

And it's the very gospel, by the way, that Jesus is bringing in Mark chapter one that addresses every issue of the heart of the day, including this one. And so, as a church, we want to say that we believe that God is absolutely for life, all of life, because he is the creator, the designer, and the sustainer of life.

And so, what that means is that you and I sitting here today have been made in the very image of God, that we have the very imprints of the hand of God all over our body. And part of what that means is you and I are not an accident, that there is intentionality behind you and me, and because we're made by the hands of the Creator, you have dignity and worth.

This is the way that King David said it in Psalm 139, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

And so, we believe that not only is God the Creator and the designer of life, but he's also the creator of sex, which reproduces life. And by God's gracious design, he created sexual intimacy to be shared in the safety, in the bond, in the covenant of marriage, within marriage.

And God's restriction of sexual intimacy to marriage was not meant to hinder us, was not meant to hold us back from experiencing what the rest of the world is, but rather it's God's safety and design rather than to hinder us, but to actually protect us. And

so, we believe that to be pro-life means to be pro all of life at every stage of life, including for the most vulnerable.

And what an opportunity, by the way, right now, for those of you, for those of us who call ourselves followers of Jesus, what a time to truly be the hands and feet of Jesus in a world that desperately needs it. There are many people, particularly many women, who are scared and angry and confused and hurting and unsure about what is next or what to do next.

And if you and I are part of the Church of Jesus Christ, faith without action is really no faith at all. And so, I want to gently ask you today if you're a follower of Jesus, who specifically or how specifically are you and I supporting those who currently are experiencing unexpected or unplanned pregnancies?

How are you or how do you plan to love and support families who are struggling right now emotionally, financially, and spiritually, and how do you plan to show the love of Jesus to those who may have a completely different worldview or take on this issue than you? This is really an opportunity to be the church, and the church is called a partner with God as he brings the kingdom to Earth as it is in heaven.

Several months ago, we had a woman from Orchard Hill named Susan Heizer, who shared her story, her testimony of how God had brought her through abortion and gave her freedom as she experienced shame and guilt, and how God brought healing to her life. And Susan has graciously offered that if this has been your story or this is something you want more information or support about, if you contact the church office, they would give you her contact information and she would be happy to reach out to you.

We also want to say this, if abortion has been or will ever be a part of your story in any way, can I encourage you from the very heart of God today that outside of a hard-hearted rejection of Jesus Christ, there is nothing that you have done or I have done or will ever do that is bigger than the mercy of God that is shown through Jesus Christ. That on the cross of Jesus Christ, He paid the penalty for every and any sin that the blood of Christ literally washed it all away as far as the East is from the West. That's how far-removed God has taken our sin from us. That there is genuine freedom from guilt and shame.

The Bible says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, that God is faithful when we are not. In our very worst, whatever that looks like is no match for God's mercy. And I can I tell you today, I am so grateful that we serve a God who does not just open his arms to receive us, but a God who literally opens his arms and

runs toward us, even at our very worst. And so, I also want you to know, wherever you are, wherever you've been, you are welcome here at Orchard Hill.

We don't want to just speak the gospel, but we want to live that out. And it's the gospel that Jesus was bringing in Mark chapter one. A gospel that is still bringing healing and restoration. And so, Jesus brings good news today, the best news free and available to all. And as a result of this good news, Jesus demands a response. And the invitation to you and I, Jesus simply says, is to repent, which means to change our mind, to agree with God, to change direction, admit our need for God, and then believe the good news, to believe in Jesus Christ.

And by the way, Jesus is the good news. You say, Brady, that might be good news, but sometimes we don't realize, or at least I speak for myself, I don't realize how good the good news is until I realize just how bad the bad news is. And when I think about that and think about how bad off would I be without the mercy of God in my own life?

And I think about what God has saved me and you, if you've trusted in Jesus, from that God has saved me from myself. God has saved me from the very penalty of sin which is death and living in eternity. Apart from Him, God has saved me from a priceless eternity. God has saved me from the power of sin that no longer has dominion over my life.

Not to say I don't struggle, but God has saved me from that power. God has saved me from the grip of Satan himself. But God didn't just save me and you from all those things, God also saved me and you for a purpose. And God has given us joy and peace that goes beyond human understanding. That when you put your faith and trust in Jesus, He invites you into His family and He saves you and enlists you to give you hope and a new mission.

And that mission, by the way, is what Jesus says is a fishing expedition. Now, I hope that you hear this morning that there really is a sense of urgency about what Jesus offers to every one of us. Jesus said, the time has come, it's an appointed time, it's here. And now Jesus said, "'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.'" And listen to the urgency, in verse 18, "At once they left their nets and followed him." They, meaning Simon and Andrew, left their nets and followed him. And he called James and John in verse 20, He said, "Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him."

And you may be here this weekend and not feel that real sense of urgency, you say, Brady, I'm here on the weekend. It's a beautiful weekend. It's Independence Day

weekend. I'm just checking things out. You may also say, Brady, that sounds good, but I don't have that same sense of urgency in my own life because if you're honest, maybe you feel like things are pretty good for you and your family. Yeah, there's a lot of chaos going on in the world, but maybe you've built up a good nest egg. Maybe the economy doesn't bother you. Maybe your own skill and work ethic has put you in a pretty good position and you've got a pretty good foundation.

But I want to gently ask you this morning, is that foundation secure enough not just for this life here now, but in the life to come? And on what basis do you put your confidence because it's into this world that the kingdom of God, the ruler, the reign of God, the way that God intends things to be, is coming by. The Kingdom is through the gospel. And the Apostle Paul, by the way, said this about the gospel. I love this. In Romans one verse 16, Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile."

And so, the invitation demands a response. And today, if you hear the urgent message of Jesus, the good news that's given to you through Jesus on the cross, then Jesus invites you to come to lay down your own life, to turn from your own way of thinking, and put your faith and hope and trust in Jesus Christ.

And there is an entrance to the kingdom in and only through Jesus Christ. So, in that sense, it's very exclusive because it's only through Jesus, but on the other hand, it's the most inclusive faith and religion in the whole world because anybody can get in on it. Anybody who simply admits their need and trust in Jesus is welcome into the kingdom.

And by the way, there was a phrase I used to use widely, and it went like this, maybe you've heard it before. Preach the gospel and only use words if necessary. And there was something compelling I thought about that statement because nobody wants to be preached to right now. That doesn't feel good. But in other words, live your life in such a way that's exemplary that maybe people would see your good life and then maybe have conversations about who God is.

But as I thought more about that statement, I think about how that flies in the face of Romans one because nobody is going to be saved by my good deeds or your good deeds because it is the gospel that is the power of God. And so hopefully, if you're a follower of Jesus today, your exemplary life will hopefully lead to conversations that can ultimately point people to Jesus.

But it is only through the mercy and the grace of Jesus that is the power of God for salvation in this life and in life to come. But it's His message through repentance and faith, and his method, by the way, to get this message out to the rest of the world is through fishing.

Now, I've always had a love-hate relationship with fishing. To me, fishing is kind of nice, but it's also kind of boring, right? I like catching more than I do fishing. And there's something peaceful, you know, it's a beautiful weekend and maybe you're a fisherman or fisherperson and you're out there and it's like you and the lake and nature. And it's awesome. But again, I tend to get a little bit antsy.

But there's something that changed my perspective on fishing. Two things, really. One is if I ever actually catch a fish, it's like, well, this is exciting. Your heart starts to reel, you start to reel it in. You don't want it to get off the hook. There is an excitement level that builds when you actually catch a fish. But, you know, there's even an added level of excitement when you're doing it with someone else who loves fishing and catches a fish.

My son is a huge fisherman and you can see the excitement on his face. He has a two-for-one special. I've never seen this before. He cast out the hook, and not only did he get one fish, but he got two fish on one cast. That's pretty impressive. That's really exciting. And so, there's a real excitement level in actually fishing.

This is the way Jesus put it in Mark 1:17-18. He said, "'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.'" At once they left their nets and followed him." And again, you and I don't know when the next chance will be to respond to Jesus' message. We're not guaranteed tomorrow. We're not guaranteed when we walk out the door, what will happen to us.

But today, if you hear the voice of God through the Word of God, Jesus invites you to respond. And part of what it means to go fishing is to follow Jesus yourself and then invite others to do the same. And by the way, it's almost impossible to give away what we don't have ourselves.

If I was trying to convince you to fish, I'm like, yeah, you should fish because you're supposed to fish. But it's not all that exciting. I mean, that's not all that compelling. I would encourage you with this. If you're a follower of Jesus, is there anything in your life that is only explainable because of God? And so why would anyone want to follow the God that you claim to know?

And as I was thinking about fishing methods, I know this. A good fisherperson, a good fisherman goes to where the fish are, right? They go to the pond or the lake or the ocean where the fish are. They offer compelling bait, which in this case is the most compelling bait in the history of planet Earth, the gospel, the good news of who Jesus is and what He's done, and what He promises to one day do.

And then a good fisherperson is just filled with joy at a catch. And so, if you're a follower of Jesus, part of your story, part of your compelling bait is not just the big story of what God is doing and what He's done through Jesus, but it's your story. That your story is no accident, that your story is part of God's bigger story, and God wants to use you wherever you've been, wherever you are, to go fishing.

And so, I want to simply ask you today, what is your pond? In other words, where do you live and work and play? Where right now has God placed you in terms of where you live, in terms of your own family, in terms of where your kids play sports, and where you work? It's no accident that you and I are where we are and God invites you into that place to simply go fishing.

And you may say, Brady, I don't know the first thing about fishing in general, let alone fishing for people. And yet I want to tell you this. When Jesus enlists people for fishing for his mission, he doesn't say, I want you to wait to go fishing until you have it all figured out or until all of your doubts are finally subsided. Or, I want you to wait until you clean up all of the mess of your own life. And then I want to send you on my mission.

No, Jesus says, and even today, if you're hearing the voice of God and you say, I want to be in a part of the kingdom that Jesus is bringing, I want to tell you as well, Jesus calls you to fish and what Jesus is looking for is simply weak, independent people who know nothing more than to simply obey Jesus and cast down their nets.

Because the reality is we may fish, but it's Jesus who brings the catch and Jesus who ultimately cleans the fish. You see, that's the heart of God. That's the responsibility, the prerogative of God. And God calls those who follow him to simply cast down their nets. And if you're a part of that mission, I want to tell you today, that's a mission that you will never regret giving your life to.

I want to conclude with this. Several years ago, there were sociologists who did a study of people who were 95 years and older. So, these are people who are getting close to the end of life. And they asked these people, what are their biggest regrets as they look back on their life? And there were three that went to the front and there's a lot of wisdom in this. I so appreciated this.

The top three responses of these people who have looked back with regret are this. They wish that they would have risked more and not played it safe. They wish they would have spent more time reflecting, and they wish they would have done more things that would live on after they die. There's a lot of wisdom in that.

People who are at the end of life say, man, if I could do it all over what I would do instead is I would risk more. I wouldn't play it safe. I would take more time in this busy world to reflect and meditate. And the third thing they said is, that I would spend more time doing something in this life that would go beyond this life and outlast me.

And I can tell you that I don't want to be among those who look back on my own life with regret. And I'm sure you don't either. And yet the time Jesus said is now. And I want you to ask yourself, what would you spend the rest of your days doing that would matter not just now but for eternity? In a million years, as you look back on your life, what will you have wished that you spent and invested your time in here and now, while God has given you breath? You know, as I think about it, it really is the mercy of God that I'm taking in a breath right now, that my heart is still beating, and it's no accident that yours is either.

I don't want to look back on my life and realize I chased things that really didn't matter. So that doesn't have to be your story. Instead, Jesus offers to every one of us, either for the first time or anew, to repent. Turn your eyes towards Jesus and believe the good news. Believe in the Savior who is done for you and me what we could never do ourselves, that on our own power and our own volition and our own morality, there's no way that a sinful human being could enter into the presence of a perfect Holy God. And yet in God's mercy, that's what He sent Jesus to do.

And if that's a part of your story, God invites you to make not only that big story, your story, but to take yours and my little story and to go fishing. And I want you to just think with me for a moment, how would that change the very spiritual landscape of this community, of this part of the world in which we live? How would things be different in the Strip District, in Butler, in Wexford, in Haiti, in the communities in which we live, as more and more people lived out the life that God called us to in Jesus Christ, more and more people simply invested in the messy lives of people and started to go fishing?

Because the potential catch of fish is in great number. The time is urgent. The time is now. Now, as Paul says, is the day of salvation. We are at a pivotal moment in our lives, maybe even in history. The Kingdom of God is at our very doorstep, and Jesus invites you and me to be a part of the kingdom that will not be shaken and will

endure forever. So, you and I have the opportunity, as you hear God's voice today, simply cast our net, start fishing and investing in the lives of others, for that's a decision and a lifestyle that you and I will never regret today and for eternity.

Let's pray. Father God, I thank you so much for your Word. I thank you that in your mercy you remind us of the urgency of the moment. Father God, I pray, especially today, if there are those who maybe for the first time have heard the voice and the urgency of your call in their lives to deny themselves, to pick up their cross and begin to follow you, that maybe today would be the first day they are part of the kingdom that you are bringing.

And God, I pray that your kingdom would come to this part of our lives and the Earth as it is in Heaven. God, that all of us would repent and turn from our own way of life and our own sin and trust and believe again, afresh and anew in the good news of the Gospel of what you've brought through Jesus Christ.

Father, I also want to pray, especially today, for those who are hurting. Specifically, maybe those today who are hurting for various reasons, in various stages over the recent Supreme Court ruling. Father, I pray that you would remind every person here that we are not outside the reach of a merciful God, that you can bring healing and forgiveness and restoration, and God, we entrust that to you.

Father, I pray that for every one of us that we would pick up our nets, cast them out, and join you in the greatest mission of helping people find and follow Jesus Christ. God, may we do it not just for our sake, but for yours and your glory? And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.