



University Christian Church – Austin

C. Kutz-Marks

The Time Is Fulfilled

Epiphany 3, b, Jan. 25, 2009

Mark 1:14-20

Having just lived in Austin 3 years now, Becca and I don't know the area nearly as well as most of you do. So we quite commonly have our "first time" experiences, but few quite as symbolic as the one we had Thursday evening.

We were on our way to a lecture at the new AT&T center here on University Ave. when we stopped for the first time for a quick meal up at the Freebirds burrito shop up at 41st St. just east of Red River in the Hancock Shopping Center. Have you ever been in there? When you walk in the shop, there about 12 feet off the ground is a Harley Davidson motorcycle suspended as if freeze framed after bursting through a concrete wall that was painted to represent the sky. And who is the lucky stiff that gets to ride this iconic picture of the very purest freedom? Yep, it's Lady Liberty roaring off unfettered and free.

I thought the scene was fabulous- a creative expression of an American dream of freedom- so, I set our burrito down on the table underneath it. Becca thought it was creepy and dangerous to sit under a dangling motorcycle so she to other side of the table.

Those of you who grew up in my generation will recognize in the burrito shop's name the allusion to the song *Freebird* by the rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd. The first verse goes... and don't worry I'm not going to sing it:

If I leave here tomorrow
Would you still remember me?
For I must be travelling on, now,
'Cause there's too many places I've got to see.
But, if I stayed here with you, girl,
Things just couldn't be the same.
'Cause I'm as free as a bird now,
And this bird you can not change.
Lord knows, I can't change.

You get the sense in this and the dozens of like themed songs that there is some innate human striving for novelty, for excitement, for thrills, for what is often called, especially in America, freedom. And there is a sense in those songs that -- whether it is a blessing or a curse -- that the escapist wanderlust, that lack of responsibility or irresponsibility, cannot be changed. It is a given. Get used to it."Lord knows, I can't change."

What do you think about that? Can we change such a deep aspect of ourselves? Can we grow into being more responsible, more stable members of our community or are we inescapably and forever freebirds?

There has been a lot of talk these past months and especially this past week about change; change in our governing; change in our financial system; change in our styles of living; change of all sorts. And no one could argue that some kinds of

change are definitely afoot. Our nation has experienced an incredible week just passed, one in which millions gathered in Washington, D.C. to witness our new President taking office. For many of those attending the events in Washington interviewed on TV, their words clearly were inadequate for the sense of elation that they were feeling. After such long last, a person of mixed race elected to the highest office in the land with such great dreams for equality and justice! A dream that they had harbored for America, answered. Perhaps they might have borrowed the words that Jesus utters in this morning's lesson, "The Time Is Fulfilled."

For us Disciples of Christ, this week offered an opportunity to witness our own denomination's General Minister and President, the Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins speak a word of challenge and change at Wednesday's prayer breakfast as she preached the sermon in the National Cathedral directly to President Obama and a great host of our new and returning national leadership.

But I find it instructive and also inspiring that the change Dr. Watkins admonished was a change that did not reinforce that notion that the freedom that is at the core of our American values has anything at all to do with the escapist wanderlust of the Lynard Skynard freebird. Dr. Watkins shared a very Biblical perspective in a very native American story.

She said, "There is a story attributed to Cherokee wisdom:ⁱⁱ

One evening a grandfather was teaching his young grandson about the internal battle that each person faces.

"There are two wolves struggling inside each of us," the old man said.

"One wolf is vengefulness, anger, resentment, self-pity, fear . . . [and though she didn't mention it Wednesday, the original story also includes, "false pride, superiority, and ego].

“The other wolf is compassion, faithfulness, hope, truth, love . . .”

The grandson sat, thinking, then asked: “Which wolf wins, Grandfather?”

His grandfather replied, “The one you feed.”

Do you feed the lady liberty crashing through walls on a Harley, or the one that stands sentinel in New York’s harbor who says, ⁱⁱⁱ

"Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name,
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Two liberties, two visions of liberty.

> One envisions the joy of wandering free of responsibility.

>The other eagerly embraces responsibility and envisions a committed welcoming of the poor, a ministry to those who are yearning for a chance to make a better life here.

+ One croons, “Lord knows, I can’t change.”

+ The other believes that change can come, change that brings a more wholesome, more compassionate commonwealth.

And to provide the final stamp of approval of the latter over the former, we have Jesus returning from 40 days in the wilderness to his home area of the Galilee, here uttering his very first words in the very earliest of the Gospel records, and the word that Jesus chose to first share was, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

"The time is fulfilled." You have waited a long time, Jesus says. Back through our history as a people, we have suffered and we have waited so long for a moment when the power of God, and the mercy of God, and the very presence of God would arrive. We have always been looking forward for a moment, and that moment has now arrived, Jesus says, "the time is fulfilled."

"The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near." The nearness of the kingdom of God was the central new teaching of Jesus. Everything else that Jesus said and did and endured flowed from this key premise, that the Kingdom of God, the reign of God, the rule of God, the realm of God, the dominion of God, was no longer just a pie in the sky, way off somewhere in the future possibility. The Realm of God is very near.

Back in Nazareth in the Gospel of Luke Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."..." Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."^{iv}

In Jesus' ministry the Realm of God was already taking hold. The sick were being healed. The demon-possessed were being cured. The spiritually hungry were being fed. He was freeing people of their sins. He was a walking, talking demonstration of how God's world would look if God's way was fully embraced by all creatures and all spirits. As Jesus answered John the Baptist's disciples, "'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.'"

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." Repent means change, or more specifically, turn. Turn from the way that you are going because it won't get you where you really want to be. Turn.

For most of us, for most good hearted people around the world, who are living ethical, moral, caring lives, this call to repentance is not so much a call to stop doing evil things and start doing good things. We are already doing a lot of good things. No, it is more a call to stop always making decisions and taking action for my sake & my family's sake & my country's sake... to take ourselves off the throne of importance as the center of the universe and, instead, put God's way in that position. The call is to start acting for God's sake with Jesus as our compassionate model & the Holy Spirit as our guide.

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." This change in basic attitude is truly freeing, truly empowering, and absolutely satisfying. That's why we call it "good news." It is rediscovering the very way we were intended to live. What could possibly be better than that?

Amen.

ⁱCheck <http://www.freebirds.com/fast/intro.htm> for another view of the icon

ⁱⁱ *An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life.*

"A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy.

"It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

ANOTHER VERSION

An elder Cherokee Native American was teaching his grandchildren about life. He said to them, "A fight is going on inside me... It is a terrible fight, and it is between two wolves. One wolf represents fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, pride and superiority. The other wolf stands for joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside of you and every other person too."

They thought about it for a minute and then one child asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee simply replied... "The one I feed." http://www.no2torture.org/quotes/quotes_morality.shtml

AND ANOTHER

Two Wolves

"One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two "wolves" inside us all.

One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

<http://brazilianheart.blogspot.com/>

ⁱⁱⁱ These words from the "The New Colossus," written in 1883, appear on the Statue's pedestal.

<http://www.libertystatepark.com/emma.htm>

^{iv} Luke 4:18-21

^v Luke 7:22-23
