

Date: 03/21/2021

Tick...Tock

Texts: **Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Hebrews 5: 5-10; John 12: 17-33**

Tick tock, tick tock. The clock ticks and it tocks and time moves forward second ... by second ... by second. There are none who feel the ticking of the clock so much as those who are living under a deadline. Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist playwright, tells of a group of such people in his play *The Living Dead*. The scene is set during the Second World War, in an attic in France: The Germans have captured and imprisoned six members of the French Resistance and in the morning when the first bell rings, the Resistance fighters will be tortured for information, and then executed.

Suddenly the door flies open and the leader of the Resistance is brought in, though the Nazis do not know who he is. He has simply been arrested for breaking the curfew and will be released in the morning. Tick tock, death is coming for the fighters. Tick tock, morning brings freedom for their unrevealed leader. How different the ticking is to each group; how one dreads and one longs for the morning bell. The six members of the Resistance make their vows to their leader: our mouths are sealed, our tongues are locked, we will not tell. The Leader makes an impassioned speech: "I thank you, for myself, for the Resistance, and for France. Your courage and your sacrifice will not be forgotten." And at that point, one of the six, a woman who is the Leader's fiancée, says, "Oh, shut up. Nothing you have to say could possibly mean anything to us. I am not blaming you ... the fact is that you are a living man and I am a dead woman, and the living and the dead have nothing to say to each other." And so the clock ticks on, tick tock, tick tock, tick tock, to the end of the play, to the first bell, the final bell and its deathly toll.

The Gospel of John portrays Jesus' ministry as under the clock. When Jesus' mother urges him to do his first miracle, the changing of the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus says to her, "What has this to do with me? My hour has not yet come." But he performs the miracle anyway, and when he does, the clock starts ticking inevitably towards that fateful hour. From this point on, he is under a deadline. Tick tock. From here on out, we know that the bell will ring when the final tock is ticked, but not yet. A few chapters later, in John 7, Jesus' teaching astonishes the leaders in Jerusalem, and they attempt to arrest him, but fail, because, as the narrator explains, "his hour had not yet come." But there it is: another tick ... tock. Just one chapter later, the pace is quickening now, the leaders try to arrest Jesus again, but again they fail, again, as the narrator tells us, because his hour had not yet come. But it is getting closer; the past is receding, the future is approaching: tick tock, tick tock. And then, a day or two before our text picks up

the tale, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, and the Jewish leaders plot to have both Jesus and Lazarus put to death because all the world is beginning to follow Jesus. Tick, tock, tick, tock. And in Jesus' own small group of disciples, an impatience and a disillusionment has crept its way into the heart of one of the Twelve, and the beginnings of a plan to betray Jesus are stirring in his mind. What will Judas do? Tick, tock, tick tock, the hour will come, the bell will ring, and with it: death. Then some Greeks come to Philip, tick, and say, "We want to see Jesus," tick, and Philip goes to Andrew, tick, and the two of them go to Jesus, tick, and tell him about the Greeks who want to see him. ... Tock. Jesus knows that when he is lifted up he will draw all the world unto himself, and here is the world, these Greeks, coming to him through the disciples, being drawn to him. With this message, Jesus hears the bell, and he says, "The hour has come." The hour has come, the hour of his death, the hour for him to be glorified.

The hour of Jesus' glory is the hour of his death. Unlike the French Resistance Leader, Jesus demands no silence to save his life, and asks for no different hour where he shall live. Instead, Jesus says, "Should I say, 'Father, save me from this hour?' No! It is *for* this hour that I have come! "The clock has been running from the beginning to bring me here, to this hour, and nowhere else. Now is the time for me to give up my life, to fall to the earth like a grain of wheat and die, so that I may bear much fruit." The First World War chaplain, Studdert-Kennedy, helps us to understand what this means for us with an address he made to his fellow chaplains as they were taking up their service:

"The one thing that you absolutely must do as chaplains is to go into the line with the men. The Army does not require it. As far as regulations are concerned, you are free to stay out of the trenches, well behind the front, and minister to the men before they go into combat and when they come back out for brief intervals.

But if you do that, you will do no good at all. There is no way that you can talk about the meaning of life and death to a man who is facing death and knows that you are not.

But if you go into the line with the men, if you get shot at and shelled and gassed along with them, then they will listen to you.

And it doesn't matter whether you are eloquent. The fact that you are there with them when you don't have to be, doing your Master's business, will tell them something about your Master."

Like those chaplains about their Master's business, Jesus, the Master himself, enters the trenches, and does not shirk the hour of his death. No one who loves Jesus will ever

have to say to him, “Oh, shut up. Nothing you say to us can have any meaning, because you are a living man and I am a dead woman, and the living and the dead have nothing to say to each other.” The clock has ticked to bring Jesus to the hour of his death, when he stands beside us, and with us, and does not avoid the fate that faces us all. He is a dead man talking to dead men and women. But he promises one day to be the living talking to the living, the resurrected one talking to the ones he has resurrected.

The forty days of Lent, with its deadline on Good Friday, remind us that we all live under the clock as well. It ticks and it tocks and we succeed and we fail, we rejoice and we suffer, we love and we lose, and time ticks and time tocks towards our final destiny. But in all the time that comes in this world, we are not going through it alone, because when Jesus’ hour came, he welcomed it for our sake. By taking on human flesh in Jesus Christ, and living under the ticking of the clock, God has earned the right to ask us to hold on a little longer until morning comes. And that morning surely shall come, when the ticking stops and the bell rings to tell us of resurrection and eternal life. For then, time shall be no more and the dead in Christ shall rise to eternal life, and every tear of this ticking time shall be wiped from every grieving eye, and we shall live in Christ’s glorified time forever.

But until then, let us make use of every second we have to do good in the world, and to glorify God. Because ... tick ... tick ... tick... tock.

Amen

Notes:

- This sermon was partially inspired by Michael Battle in *Feasting on the Word* and James Kiefer in his meditation at:
<http://intiversity1.uchicago.edu/kal/goodfridaymed.html>.
- Some elements of Sartre’s play have been slightly changed for dramatic effect.