

**Christ Church, Georgetown**  
**Sermon by the Rev. Timothy Cole**  
**Sunday, October 30, 2016**  
**Luke 19:1-10 - Zacchaeus**

I was very fortunate last week to be invited to attend an address and discussion led by Allen Packwood who is the Director of the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge.

Churchill is renowned for many quotations and Mr. Packwood, with a wry smile, asked what Churchill might have said about our current political situation here. Taking an entirely neutral position, as is only appropriate for a foreigner (as I know well!) and safe in the knowledge that it could be taken either way, he said that Churchill might well have repeated what he once said, that “Americans can always be counted on to do the right thing ... after they have exhausted all other alternatives.”

People often talk about being able to say exactly where they were when President Kennedy was assassinated. Well, I can say exactly where I was on 30th January 1965 when Churchill’s funeral took place. It is, in fact, one of my earliest memories. I do remember sitting, as a five-year-old child, with my family in front of a black and white television set, watching the great procession through the streets of London and the coffin on the gun carriage draped with the Union Jack. I didn’t know who he was then, but I knew my parents were very quiet and I saw the tears in my mother’s eyes.

If ever there was the case of “Cometh the hour, cometh the man” I suppose he was it. And, perhaps we were bound to think this, since, as he also said, “History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.” and he did!

Elizabeth sent me a little book when I was waiting to come here called “To Everything a Season - a Spirituality of Time” by the Virginian New Testament scholar and poet Bonnie Thurston. In it Professor Thurston points out that Greek has three words for time; ‘eon’ - an age, ‘chronos’ - a period of chronological time and the much richer word ‘Karios’ - which indicates a decisive moment, a moment pregnant with import. It is the word used when Jesus says “My time is at hand” as he prepares for the Last Supper (Mat 28.18) or when he announces that, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel” (Mk 1.15).

Those moments in our lives that are somehow burdened with implications, resonant with meaning and potential, are Karios moments. Moments when our turning points of personal history are about to be made.

As I read again this familiar account of Zacchaeus in this morning’s Gospel it occurs to me that he is so ready for it. So ready for what is coming down that road to meet him. As Kristen said last week about the tax collector unable to lift his eyes to heaven, Zacchaeus is a hated figure. Not just in the sense that all tax collectors down the ages are... well, less than our favorite people(!), but in the much deeper sense of a quisling, a traitor that collected taxes for the occupying power. He is like the French official that is collaborating with the Nazis in occupied France in World War II. He is not only despised, but he knows all too well why he is despised.

Now, we have no knowledge of what is going on inside Zacchaeus’ life but the fact that he, a wealthy man, goes to the length of climbing up a tree just to see Jesus, must make us think that

something profound is already going on inside him. The time is very much at hand for him. This Karios moment that approaches has been coming, we sense, for some time.

When Jesus sees him and calls him, the dam of his life is broken and all the guilt and regret and the torture of a troubled conscience pours out of him. Salvation comes to his house. Repentance and change come to his house. Jesus brings it, but the need for it was surely already there in spades.

This is not 'Cometh the hour, cometh the man', this is 'Cometh the man, cometh the hour'. Cometh Jesus, the man and cometh Zacchaeus' hour.

This rings true for all our lives, doesn't it? Things build up in us. Things quietly trouble us over long periods of time. Sadness, or suffering or unease, murmur in the back of our minds and our days; something undefined and largely unnoticed.

I remember visiting a house many years ago. I went never having met the person that lived there. In those days, in Scotland, the hospitals would give clergy a list of all the people of their denomination who had been admitted and we would visit them. In this case I had missed this man in the hospital and so I called at his house to see how he was doing. I rang the door bell but there was no answer. There was no one home. So I turned to go back down the drive and, as I did, a man walked into it. He was the man I had come to see. It was obvious that he was visibly taken aback when he saw me. "You know," he said, "it is the strangest thing. But today I am coming home after the last day of my working life. Thirty years I have been working in that office and the day I finish and come home for good I find a priest standing in my doorway!"

We sat and talked for some time and he told me many things about his life and how God had had little enough a part in it. And yet, today, me being there had made him think of whether, all along these many years, he had been ignoring something. It had always been there but it only dawned on him because of this strange occurrence. He was genuinely moved by it. It was a Karios moment for him. A moment in which the God-shaped hole in his life began to become clear to him. I didn't bring that with me. It was already there. It made me realize that, perhaps, we are often sent without knowing we are. Cometh the man, cometh the hour.

Some turning points, some moments in which God bursts a dam in us like Zacchaeus are the result of a long quiet build up in our lives, but we can also be struck by events in a sudden and brutal way.

One of the sad tasks of an Army Chaplain on operations is to go with representatives of a unit to the field hospital to formally identify the body of a soldier fallen in action. Even though it is clear who the soldier is, there still has to be a formal identification by someone who knows them before a casualty notification can be sent. It is an opportunity to say a prayer with the person and the body and to be with them in what is not the nicest of tasks. I remember one such incident where two young soldiers had asked to be allowed to be the ones to do this. Normally it would be an officer or a non-commissioned officer from the unit, but the casualty was the best friend of these two lads and they wanted to be the ones who saw him this one last time. So I went with them and said the prayers and stood with them afterwards outside the back of the hospital tent and had a smoke with them.

As we stood and talked, one of the young soldiers said to me, "Padre, I never really went much on this God thing you know. But, being out here, and being here today, has made me think that there has to be something more than this. I don't know anything about it but I think God is there."

Sometimes life just hits us doesn't it? I think I would expect people in such circumstances to be less likely to believe in God after something like that than before, and yet, just the opposite can be the case. A dam can be burst by a gradual build up of pressure over a long period of time but it can also be burst by a sudden impact of great power. Cometh the man, cometh the hour.

So we never know when the time will be at hand for us, when we will have that Karios moment, when Christ will come down the street and look up at us in our tree of curiosity or half-knowing expectation and, to our great surprise, call us to come down.

We also never know when the time will be at hand for others around us. As Christians, I think we need to try to keep in mind that we might be the unsuspecting man or woman that 'cometh' or that is sent, on Our Lord's behalf, for somebody else's hour.

How will we know that? Probably we won't, but we can be watching for it and be ready to spend time with people when it happens. We can also be listening for the still small voice that whispers to us 'cometh the man, cometh the hour'. "Today salvation has come to this house."

Churchill did not see himself as a deeply religious person. When commended for being a pillar of the Church he replied "No, no - not a pillar but a flying buttress, supporting it from the outside." In fact, God appears often in Churchill's most important speeches and he certainly had a huge sense of his own destiny to do some great work for the good of Christian Civilization. Some people make better, far better, instruments than they ever would musicians, but God calls each of us according to our gifts and according to his purpose. All of us have moments when our time is at hand, when it is our time to meet Christ or it is our time to fulfill his will for us and to do what he has sent us here to do. May we, like Zacchaeus, know these times when we see them.