

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

Litany

Based on Psalm 139

O Lord, you have searched us and known us.

You know when we sit down and when we rise up.

Our thoughts are known in your knowing.

Wherever we go you are already there, **you know the firing of each nerve cell before they find their way into words. We belong to you and live in you.**

Let us pray:

How vast is your mind, O God! It is too much for us, we cannot comprehend it. From the center of life to its edges we trust and follow. Amen.

The Scripture

Acts 1:1-14

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The Message

Is It Time?

Mark Briley

Synopsis: We always want to know the time. Whether it is a question about kick-off on game day; that one-eye squint at the alarm clock when awakened in the middle of the night; or the biggies of life, death, and the timing of God. What time is it? *Is it time?* iSo many questions. Standing in moments of transition and new seasons, it is also the timing question we humbly ask. Is this the time? Is this it? Is this the moment we find a new way, a new hope, a new challenge? The disciples desperately wanted to know

the answer to that question as they stood with the resurrected Jesus for the final time. "Now what? Is this the time, Jesus?" His answer, typical in his wisdom, surely surprised them. Maybe a little surprise when it comes to the matter of timing might not be so bad for us either.



Good morning, Broadway! It feels so good to say that! It truly is wonderful to stand before you in this moment. I am humbled and honored and would like to thank you for the opportunity to be one of your pastors. I am grateful to so many who have already welcomed us into this family of faith: to Charlotte George and Joe Horner, co-chairs of the search committee who led that process like a Bible Study – praying through the ins and outs and arounds and throughs of such an important process in the life of the church. To John and Linda Poehlmann for hosting us so graciously when we were in town. To the Search Team who was honest and open, kind and heartfelt – here we are, friends. To Nick and Terry and our staff team who have included me as an insider from the beginning; I couldn't be more grateful. We are working at the speed of trust and that shall guide us forward in these early days of our walk together. To the past-ministers who have served among you who reached to me with a word, a letter, and even a Murry's sandwich, thank you for serving and for wishing us all well in this new season. To my family from out of town and in town and friends from back-in-the-day and even some *family* I had the privilege of marrying who are in the house, or will be yet today, thank you for the love and support. And to all of you, who have embraced

my family, made our friendship “*Facebook Official*”, or otherwise extended a prayer, a hand, or a card to welcome us... thank you, thank you, thank you.

Now... what I wouldn't give to know what is going on in your mind at this very moment. If you read my newsletter article this week, and I know you all surely read my newsletter article this week, I quoted Anne Lamott, who suggests we may not always really want to know what someone else is thinking. She admitted this by saying, “*My mind is like a bad neighborhood. You never want to go in there alone.*”

But we know it's true that we talk to ourselves more than anybody else. Charles Fernyhough, a professor at Durham in the U.K. wrote a book about the history of “*inner speech*,” which is just a more formal way of describing how we talk to ourselves in our head.¹ Because we don't talk to ourselves in full sentences, because you know, we know what we mean... and because we don't have to use our tongues and lips and voice boxes to produce speech, Fernyhough says our inner speech clocks in at 4,000 words per minute. This means that just this morning at church, with some variance for attendance and how alert some of us are early in the morning, some 384-million words will be spoken internally by our church today. Talk about gossip!

My point? There are lots of things running through your mind and mine this morning. And that's normal. There is a great deal of emotion wrapped up into any significant change in our lives. The church can't help but feel this when a new pastor comes to town.

Some of you sit here reminiscing. You are remembering the beginning years of Broadway and what things were like “*back then.*” Some of you are still gleaming from the beautiful music that still rings in the rafters. Some of you are trying to make sense of my hairstyle or wondering if you turned the crockpot on before you left the house or not. [*Need a second? Crockpots good? Good.*] Some of you have a resonate joy in your spirit even as some of you have a twinge of grief that is sitting in that soul-space where it creeps up on you now and again. We all come to this moment with different feelings and emotions... excitement, anxiety, hope, etc., etc. I don't know what you bring into this moment, but I would love to know what's happening in your mind right now as we sit here at 2601 W. Broadway.

In the position I stand, I guess you get the opportunity to know what's on my mind. I thought I would actually preach a little differently than usual. (And you are now thinking, “*How would we know?*” Valid point!). This morning, I want to tell you all of the things that I was going to say but decided not to.

First, I thought I would tell you about *you*... about who *you* are. You are sixty-one years old, Broadway. There was a month of parties last year for the big 60th celebration and

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/11/figuring-out-how-and-why-we-talk-to-ourselves/508487/>

it was wonderful. You celebrated the sacred history of this church. You remembered the Sunday School classes that formed this church into who she has become. You celebrated the incredible generosity of our people who made Broadway among the very top givers in our denomination to outreach causes that met great needs. You sang the hymns that launched you those first many Sunday's ago, you lifted voices of your history... there was food, right? Of course, there was food and you dreamed about who you hoped to become in the next 60 years.

I considered using a text from the 2nd chapter of Acts as I thought about who you are. A word from Peter who proclaims that *"the promise [of faith and life and hope in Jesus Christ] is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."*

You are a church who cares about the future, who knows that this promise of faith is not just for you, but it's also for your children and grandchildren. And as you set the bar for all of Columbia – it's for *All God's Children* whom the Lord God calls to us still. And I know this about you... there's a reputation you know... people are talking. You want the vibrancy of this place to come alive in the lives of Generation Next.

You know each one of us will relish in that joy as the vitality of this group of people known as the Church grows, reaches out to others and welcomes them into the church. So I thought I would thank you for your sacred history and your fore-sightedness to be open to reaching another generation with the promise of Christ... but, I decided you already know that. You know more about yourself than I do. You know the church must evolve and change to keep its mission relevant to a new generation hungry for faith. So I thought I wouldn't tell you that this morning.

"Tell them about me," I thought. They might want to know something about me, perhaps. Tell them you're a Missouri Tiger fan.



I sat in those stands yesterday afternoon with my boys at their first MU football game trying not to lose my voice knowing I would need it this morning.

I was raised just up the road in Macon, Missouri, in the home of a Disciples pastor and special education teacher. I'm a third generation minister of our denomination, which only means my baby bottles were in the shape of a Chalice instead of the normal kind.

When I left for college, I moved to the big city lights of Columbia and lived next door to Broadway Christian Church in what was then called Gatehouse Apartments. I roomed with my big brother, who was attending Columbia College and doing his student

teaching at Hickman High. *I* was going to be a sports broadcaster myself. I spent a day with Brian Neuner here in Columbia. Love sports but got fascinated with psychology and thought I would become a forensic psychologist (*roughly the same thing as ministry sometimes*).

But then I met a beautiful, Columbia-raised girl whom I married 20 years ago last month that changed the course of our future. Carrie is full of faith and showed me the Light in a way that finding yourself and falling in love is apt to do and boom, we were serving in the church, and I was heading to seminary. We have loved serving the local church in Indianapolis and Tulsa these past 20 years and have experienced great growth and passion in those churches, We give thanks to have journeyed with along the way.

We have three young-ish children who I couldn't be more proud of for their unique ways of being in the world -- discovering life and faith and purpose. As they began new schools here in Columbia just a couple of weeks ago, our youngest, Hayes, was starting 2nd grade at Beulah Ralph Elementary, A shout out to Ms. Lister's class! As is often the case, Ms. Lister had the kids bring a picture of their family so they could introduce their people to their classmates. So we got a picture printed off and set up in the little required frame and I said to Hayes, "*How are you going to introduce us? What will you say about Mom?*" Hayes lit up and immediately said, "*My Mom is the greatest runner in the whole world!*" "Wow!" I thought. That's high praise and Carrie has amazed me with her running feats. She ran the Boston Marathon the last two years. Two years ago, it was the worst weather conditions of the storied race's history, and she still got her personal record. "*Best runner in the world! Alright, buddy.*"

So I was stoked to hear how he'd introduce me to his class. "*What will you say about me, Hayes?*" He thinks for a minute and says, "*My dad is a pretty good pastor.*" Well, that's not greatest in the world sort of stuff. A strong lesson in humility, I suppose.

Morgan just made the show choir at Gentry Middle School this week. Dane joined the TimberTonics at Beulah Ralph and also caught a nice bass this week fishing while standing on a paddle board in the pond across the way from my mother-in-law's place, where we're staying while our home is being built.

Truth is... we love the church and we have a passion for the Way of Jesus and have given our lives to try to meet that Way of love with the needs of the world. Not a more powerful intersection exists in this world. But I didn't want to bore you with details about me and my family. You'll learn that soon enough, so I decided not to tell you that today.

Tell them about your hope for the future, I thought. Tell them about all we can do together if we focus our energy on the vision God will provide for us. Tell them that we should have a blast being the church together for there is nothing more joy-filled and

transformative than finding the pulse of what God wants to do next in the world and becoming a part of it. It's not always easy. We'll have trials and different opinions along the way. Tell them what John Wesley would say, I thought. "*We may not always think alike, but we must always love alike.*" Invite them to imagine new people finding their way into faith and this very church because we were a hospitable place of love, welcome, relevance and purpose. Imagine youth and adults being baptized, charged to deepen their commitment to God.

Imagine a Columbia community that says, "*Thank God for Broadway Christian Church... they're connecting the Really Real to the real life of every generation.*"

This could be a Book of Acts moment... what Steve Westgate said at our first Board Meeting 12- days ago – an Acts 29 moment where new chapters of the Church of Jesus Christ, yet to be written, are finding their way in this city with moving hands and feet and soul and transformation... a moment where the great homilectician, Dr. Frank Thomas preached, "*Suddenly!*" ... an ever indication of the Spirit's presence in scripture... *Suddenly!* Something has happened, is happening... the Spirit of God is alive and causing people to set aside differences and bitterness and short-sightedness because the dream of a God-sized vision is too beautiful to get bogged down in committee meetings where agenda item 67 about that "*Old Business*" item carried over since the '80s is no longer of greatest concern.

Tell them, I thought, how we might reclaim the excitement of Pentecost as the book of Acts recalls the words of the prophet Joel, "*Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, the young people will have visions and the Seasoned Spirits among us will dream dreams.*" And as the story is told, with such a Spirit, day by day, many were added to the number joining the Way.... turned on to a life they never knew possible. But I thought, "*Don't bite off too much on the first week.*" So I decided *not* to tell you that either. To be honest, I was just meeting dead end after dead end. What could I possibly share with you today? Acts kept picking at my soul... especially this little word at the onset of Luke's continued Gospel... spilling into the Acts of the church.

After all the disciples had been through with Jesus... and we often just accept the story as no big deal... but here's a group of people that have abandoned their day jobs, followed this carpenter around, watched... **and participated in**... miracles and unheard of teaching and radical acceptance of the outsiders and winning rap battle after rap battle against the stuffy religious types... to watching him die a criminal's death only to come back to life, show his wounds and say, "*Your turn!*" **and they said. YES!**

This is insane, okay... but its insanity solidifies for me this sense that Jesus was legit and worth cashing it all in for. And so here they are, Jesus is back. They had fish tacos on the beach for breakfast (*according to John anyway*) and now Luke has Jesus

with the core followers one more time. And the disciples ask, *“Is this the time?”* They had been asking this of him all along. They were so eager. They aren’t that different than us. We’re always asking, *“Is this the time?” “Can this be the time?”* *Is now finally the time when every heart might truly grasp the Spirit of truth and grace and peace and love. Please... can this be the time?”*

Jesus has done it all and this crew is hooked and they’re feeling unstoppable. I mean, resurrection, you know? They were salivating like a kid watching the guy whirl their cotton candy on that little wand. *“Jesus... world domination... you, us, now. Is this the time?”* They’re almost giddy. But Jesus, as he so often did, said, *“Hold the phone, team. Put down your devices and pay real close attention.”* Fortunately, for us, Luke was live tweeting this moment and captures what Jesus says: *“You don’t get to know the time. That’s God’s business. What you will get is the Holy Spirit; and when that Spirit comes to you, receive that gift and then be that gift in the world.”*

That’s it, I thought. It’s this question of time. Sixty-one sacred years are behind us but what is to come? Is it time? Is it time for the Realm of God to manifest itself in a new way among us here at Broadway?

You’ve walked this past year as a congregation wondering what might be next. Is it time to find out? I have something to confess. It’s a bit embarrassing but I’m just telling you what comes to my mind today, right? QuikTrip – the convenience store? That’s our families jam. The founder was in our church in Tulsa, a marvelous and generous man, who among many other things, donated QuikTrip’s original headquarters to Phillips Theological Seminary, one of our Disciples seminaries, which remains its home today. So we get over to the only QuikTrip in Columbia as often as we can.

But Break Time is everywhere in this town, and we’ve had to make some stops there. I learn the clerks ask you a question every time you check out. Did you know this? It took me a hot minute to figure it out. First cashier I encountered rung up our items and I was all ready to pay and he says, *“Do you have MyTime?”* My inner speech was all, *“My time, eh? This guy’s a little possessive about time, right? My time? We’re all living here, man.”* But, whatever, I’m always down to help. So I looked at my phone and I was like, *“It’s, uh, 4:30.”* He looked at me like I was an alien. I was new to town after all. He finally says, *“No. Do you have a My Time rewards card?”* And, no, I do not. But I haven’t shaken that question since. *“Do you have MyTime?”* Jesus says, *“That’s not yours to know.”* Well, great. Then what are we supposed to do.

I’m not one to argue with Jesus, but I think there may be a secret here worth holding on to. I think we just might know something about God’s timing. I’m not saying we can pinpoint life’s events, but this question of time is a life and death question. It is almost instinctual.

A mother on the brink of labor almost knows and says, *"I think it's time."* As one approaches the end of life, they almost always know in that moment, *"It is time."*

There is weight and anxiety and anticipation in this question of time. But Jesus eases that for us. Just do what you need to be doing and don't worry about time. What are we to be doing? We are to be conduits of the Holy Spirit, serving as witnesses to the ends of the earth. Even in Columbia, Missouri, where the Break Time clerks eagerly ask you every time you check out, *"Do you have MyTime?"*

We are to be living testimonies of grace and hope to our neighbors – to our families, to our co-workers at the cubicle farm in the office. When we can do that faithfully with enthusiasm, we can change the world. *"Is it time for the kingdom to come?"* they ask. It's always time. It's always time to be love to someone in need. It's always time to introduce another to loving community. It's always time to be an advocate for the least of these. It's always time to study, to pray, to get involved in our work together. Is it time? It most certainly is. The disciples figured this out, too. Jesus ascends, and what do they do next? They left the mountain and went back into the real world where life happens. They take roll call. And then my favorite line of all: Acts 1:14: *"They agreed they were in this for good, completely together in prayer."*

My new friends and church family, I don't know fully what is ahead of us. I don't have a magic wand or crystal ball. I'm just on the Way with you.

In fact, the most meaningful thing I think any of you have said to me this far was a note I got following the Call extended for us to come join you in this effort. My new friend said this, *"With [our] family, you've already found friends who accept you and your family. As far as we're concerned the pastoral vetting and evaluation ended with the nomination on Sunday. We're just happy to welcome you and your family just as you are."*

I don't have all of the answers, nor do I always have the right questions. But I do know this. It is time. It is time for the kingdom of God to be made anew on earth as it is in heaven. We pray that every week in worship. Can we become the answer to that prayer? I know I'm excited to be here and I hope you are, too.

I hope that whether you've been at Broadway since day one, you've come back after a time away, or this *is* day one for you here, know this: we need you. Our community needs your presence. The Spirit will guide us if we open ourselves to listen. And who knows what might happen.

I have an idea. The kingdom becomes real. It becomes known. It transforms our lives and the lives of others.

I don't know what's on your mind this morning, but that's on mine. And that sounds marvelous to me. I want to be a part of a church like that, Broadway. Is it time? Is it time to awaken this Body? Is it time to be full-hearted witnesses? Is it time to smile, to pray, to sing our hearts out, to see new people come to know the God of hope we have come to know? It is time. It is *always* time.

That's what I thought I would share with you this morning. So, I did.