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“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:3).

When the best time and what is the best way to bring about epochal change in the course of human history? What signs of the times indicate the propitious moment, the turning point, and what kind of power is needed to accomplish the desired transformation?

Charles Dickens began his classic novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, with the words “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ...” More metaphor than strategy, Dickens nonetheless affirmed that crisis holds promise, despair reveals hope, and that an act of love is the single most powerful force in history because it can move the human heart.

St. Paul’s litany of afflictions was proof to him that God was at work in “much endurance, hardships, constraints, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, vigils and fasts.” Adversity was the measure of how important his ministry was, and against all odds he knew the Holy Spirit was giving birth to a New Age.

As to methods, Paul lived in a world of brute force. The Pax Romana was for much of the world a time of conquest and terror, economic exploitation and corruption. For any religious movement to propose nonviolence and self-sacrificing love as the way forward was sheer folly. For teaching his disciples to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile and offer no resistance to one who is evil, Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified as a dangerous troublemaker.

Because we know that Christianity in fact succeeded in shaping Western civilization, we forget what an uphill climb it must have seemed to the early church Paul was building one community at a time across Asia Minor. His letters and the Gospel of Matthew were written against a closed horizon of persecution and uncertainty. Their message of hope was proclaimed in the face of hard facts, indifference and constant threats.

That was then, but what about now? The challenge of faith today is to ask how much hope we have that God is at work in our world. How confident are we that truth overcomes lies, that nonviolence is more effective than force, and that the myriad of problems that seem to be dragging the world back into tribalism and destructive nationalism can be resolved with wisdom and restraint?

What is the cost of discipleship for us, and what will it take for us to awaken to the suffering of others caught in the many global crises that are already defining our time and judging our generation? Paul says that now is the acceptable time and the

day of salvation. Jesus began a revolution by laying down his life. If we open our hearts to this kind of love, the Holy Spirit will show us how to turn the worst of times into the best of times.

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