

“Making the Most of It”

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Rocky River Presbyterian Church
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and Matthew 28: 16-20

Hate to say, folks, but we're stuck in it, chronos in Greek, chronology in our language, our passing through time. Oh, time is not universal. It does have a location. Under heaven A time for every matter under heaven. God's kingdom is not bound to this phenomena of earthly life in which we constantly say, "Hey, what time is it...how much time before we...how long will it be until we're there... is that enough time to do "whatever?" We are forever --oops, that's a heavenly word, forever, eternal, never-ending - we are frequently referring to how much time do we have, what time is it now and how much time will that take, past, present and future. We have an entire vocabulary for all those nanoseconds to light years, to measure it, lament it's passing, wonder how much of it doing "whatever" will take and we even do a fair amount of denying it's reality -- until we visit old friends and that adorable little preschooler we so enjoyed finding her now driving and heading off to college. "Where did all that time go?"

Up until last March, you know these past 11 months of the pandemic and quarantine, a time of such questioning, anxiety and hope in warp-speed for a vaccine (that single half-sentence just had three references essentially to time), well, up until last March I volunteered at Thomas Jefferson International Welcome Academy, a Cleveland Metro School at 46th and Clark, a really beautiful place from preschoolers through high schoolers for refugee and immigrant children. I volunteer in Mrs. Harris's 3rd grade class, usually with, oh, 25 students from about 10 different countries and Puerto Rico, speaking 7-8 native languages, now all learning English.

Combining math lessons and lessons on learning about time: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, decades, centuries..she asked the class, "What would you call ten decades? What word would we use for 10 decades?"

She then suddenly referenced my parents, who at that time were 97 years old. "Mr. Gorman's parents are close to 10 decades. What word do we have for that...I'll give you a bonus point today if you get it right.' Hands went up. Luis, a smart 8 year old from El Salvador, was called upon. "Ok, Luis," Mrs. Harris repeated (something you do a lot to help all in this class understand English vocabulary, 'What word do we have for ten decades?" as she again shot a glance in my direction, her classroom volunteer aide. Luis, hesitated, "We would say Mr. Gorman's parents are OLD."

Mrs. Harris and I burst into laughter. "Luis, I was looking for the word 'century.' but your answer is also right. Anyone who lives 10 decades, a century, is old. You get that bonus point!"

More “timely” words.

Preschooler, child, adolescent, teens, college age, young professional, middle aged, senior, over-the-hill, my, we have words which seek to describe a lot about a person...and the time of their lives. We wear that watch on our wrist, probably every room in your home has one, a clock, lots of our appliances tell time, measure time, call us when “time is up” lest we burn those chocolate chip cookies, booming carolers and bells around the world remind the whole village, heck the whole city, the hours of the day.

This human condition, this measuring stick of all this passage of existence “under heaven” we measure, too, in the words in music, popular and sacred: “525 thousand, 600 minutes” the big song actually called “Seasons of Love” in the musical “Rent;” “One Day More,” the monster medley combining all the first songs in “Les Miz;” “Day by Day,” actually a song from Christendom re-written and made popular in “Godspell.” Cat Stephens did the same thing with “Morning Has Broken” (you’ll find that one in our hymnal) and the rock group, the Byrds, took Pete Seeger’s song “Turn, Turn, Turn,” and made it one of their signature hits, ripping the lyrics right out of Ecclesiastes 3.

A quick turn through our own older and present hymnals, finds some of our own favorite hymns referencing time: “I Need Thee Every Hour,” “For the Beauty of the Earth,” “Day is Done,” and “Holy, Holy, Holy” all have time references. Even the most beloved of hymns, “Amazing Grace,” takes our earthly time we mistakenly carry into heaven, “When we’ve been there 10,000 years” which won’t be enough time for all our praise of God. But not to worry, in heaven, praise WILL never end, just read Revelations, for time is of the essence here and unmeasurable there, an eternal now of praising God.

How is time filled for us, from being born to dying? To mention a few from our scripture passage: a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn (how real is that time for us right now) and a time to dance (which is really “to party” and how we’re looking forward to that time); a time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep silence and a time to speak; yes, a time of war and a time of peace - how close do these did we come on January 6th and a secure peace-held capitol on January 20th.

Within our place under heaven where the Creator placed the creation, this time-laden orb revolving as it does, revolving around the sun, our moon revolving around us, the night and day, the year and leap year when we correct our being off

time, within all that reality and vocabulary those 8 and 9 year olds in my class seek to understand, well, let's add another layer of clarity to time.

By the nature of this poetic language capturing our lives in Ecclesiastes 3, some might mistake that time is split between these: killing and healing; keeping and throwing away; love and hate? The list in this passage does cover a lot of ground, so many of the moments, seasons in those 525 thousand 600 minutes of each year and the 97 year old people I have loved for so long in my 72 years; well, this list is less about equals than the phenomena of life Dickens was so succinctly introducing in "A Tale of Two Cities, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Suddenly, now, we're not talking about the phenomena of time, the measuring of it, the passages Sheehy wrote in her book, but the quality of what goes on in our timely existence: the best and the worst.

May I add another little thought here: it's not 50-50. It's not one or the other. No one would survive a life that is half killing, just ask the immigrant and refugee children in my school. When things get bad enough, when your days are too difficult and there are not enough of them filled with peace and hope, you leave. They have. Virtually, all 900 of them. Seeking a better place; well, a better time.

We want the quality of our time to be filled with the good. I'm pretty sure most of us have not liked this time of masks, separation-by-6 feet or more, washing hands, Zooming on our computers, missing worshipping together, maybe honestly missing the coffee hour as much!

This very time has brought us to tears, anxiety, hoping and hoping, and, I bet, even a few bad words...and I'm not just speaking of the Covid Virus, I'm also speaking of politics. Layered together with the strained economy and racial tensions and school closures, stores and restaurants closed or going out of business, and the theatres clearly in a time of silence, and I'm one of those Red Coats who ushered you to your seats... and...and...you and I could write quite a list concerning our present dilemmas after the 8th verse of this passage could we not?

The good news is clear: it's going to change folks. I trust we will never take "the other time," the larger times prior to last March; I trust we will not take for granted the good times. Let us earnestly, purposefully make the most of the time that God assures us is coming. Scripture says as much. Hear these words out of the very next paragraph following these first eight verses of Ecclesiastes 3, verses 12 and 13,

I know that there is nothing better for them - for us - than to be happy (that word also means "blessed") to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in their toil.

Here, I would include, our home chores, our occupations or the pleasure of volunteerism in a thousand places including this church.

I admit it, here and now, our time is a muddle in so many ways. We've measured it for 11 months and sure don't want another second, another day...week...month...season of it.

"Class, what is the word for 365 days?" Mrs. Harris has asked. Thinking about this past year, we sure don't want another!

I'm with you. I've got hopes and plans. I want to visit my 97 year old mother and get back into that 3rd grade classroom of delightful children. I want to take my wife on yet another overseas adventure. I want to hug my children and grandchildren, I want to preach in your pulpit - if invited - and shake your hands at the door and try not to spill my coffee when bumped by someone in the fellowship time - yes, we got that close. You know, I want to see your smile. Lord, I miss smiles, don't you?

I miss it, and look forward to that promised happy, happier time because I've known it. Like you, we've known so many good times, I can't tell you how much time that covers, happy, blessed time. I probably should have given more thanks right then for what God provided; and God provides still with memory and hope and love and renewal and best of all, His very Son, who came from God's no-time kingdom into this time-laden world, promising to stick with us until the close of the age, however much time that might be under heaven. Knowing some history, having some personal experience, having faith in this Lord's grace and promises, you and I share a holy unlimited relationship known in our time by God's Spirit in spite of all those muddled circumstances of our world.

Let us keep these transcendent qualities of our now, using them for better times here, these binding and building qualities of joy, peace, hope and love among us; then, we will magnify these far beyond this earthly time under heaven, as we confidently move to God's eternity filled with thanksgiving and praise. Amen.