

“What Time Is It?” CHC 8-23-15

I have found myself pondering the essence and meaning of time more at this juncture in life than ever before. Perhaps it has to do with too many birthdays. A common comment is the awareness that as we age time seems to clip along so much faster. As a child it seemed that Christmas took forever to come around. As an adult it comes too fast.

Time is elusive. I laughed how Karen Mills talked about her experience with time. “I won’t walk into the store, but I will hire a personal trainer to get me in shape. That’s because it is not about exercise, it’s about time. I have to hurry and get gas, so I won’t be late for my Pilates class. When my workout is over, I have a massage, a chemical peel and an appointment to get my hair highlighted---all before taking a meditation class to learn how to slow down.

After meditating and attending a class on “Zen driving”, I race off to my therapist where I spend an hour delving into my psyche, looking for answers to my emotional eating. Then I grab a cookie and dash out the door to have dinner with my book club.

Whew! If I had to take time to walk into the store, I’d never get it all done” (Homiletics, July-August, 2015, p.60).

Psalm 90, a prayer of Moses, reflects on it this way; “For all of our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh. The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away...So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart” (Psalm 90:9-12).

With time our perspective on life changes. The book of Ecclesiastes is a reflection on the meaning of life and our time on earth from the vantage point of one looking back over the years. Our writer ponders “how the human heart is fully set to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11). He notes our proclivity to use the time God has given us for activities that demean life rather than uplift it. Even in the time set aside for worship he urges us to “Guard our steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools” (5:1).

Proverbs 4 is an urgent appeal to acquire wisdom in our use of time and the importance of nurturing it daily. There is a promise attached as well. “Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her” (Proverbs 4:7-8).

We attach our own meaning to time. Betty shared with me a comment someone made after a meeting she attended. The person said, “That is an hour and a half I will never get back”. We might reflect on time we spend in some activity and make an evaluative comment as to the quality of that time. Was it good or a waste? Since returning from vacation the most common question is, ‘How was your time?’ A dentist friend of mine from another congregation always enjoyed reminding me that “time is money”.

The novelist Thomas Wolfe, in his work, “You Can’t Go Home Again”, reflects upon time as experienced by the crowd in a large railway station. The station, “murmurs with the immense and distant sound of time”, was filled with people “brought together for a moment at the beginning or end of their

innumerable journeys”, and “here one saw their greetings and farewells”, and “in a single instant, one got the entire picture of the human destiny. People came and went, they passed and vanished, and all were moving through the moments of their lives to death, all made small tickings in the sound of time--- but the voice of time remained aloof and unperturbed, a drowsy and eternal murmur below the immense and distant roof” (Homiletics, July-August, 2015, p.60).

And so is it any wonder that Paul writes, “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15). It is an admonition to be wise in our use of time, coupled with an awareness of the temptation to misuse the time on earth God gives us. As Anne Dillard writes in “Holy the Firm”, “We do need reminding not of what God can do, but of what he cannot do, will not, which is to catch time in its free fall and stick a nickel’s worth of sense into our days” (Homiletics,p.60).

There are two kinds of time. We are all familiar with chronos time from which we get chronological time. But the time Paul is referring to is Kairos time. That is the Greek word he uses. It is time in a qualitative, eternal dimension. It won’t be found on the digital numbers on a screen or the hands of a dial. It is not extrinsically defined in billable hours. Rather, it moves us into the qualitative realm of time Moses considers in Psalm 90, our use of time Solomon ponders amidst the attitudes and actions of people in Ecclesiastes, and the mystery of time’s unperturbed and seemingly indifferent aloofness referenced by Thomas Wolfe.

Kairos time is understood in relation to a decisive, appropriate moment when God intervenes. This sense of Kairos is found in Galatians 4:4; “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may receive adoption as children”. God exists outside of our chronos time and uses time like an artist chooses a medium to work with. God is unbound by time. Paul reflects upon the pre-existence of Christ in Colossians; “He himself is before all things...” and yet he enters our time via the incarnation. (Yancey, “Grace Notes”, p.135).

Philipp Yancey looks at our arguments over foreknowledge and predestination as awkward attempts to comprehend what, to us, can only make sense in our dimension of time. After all, what rules apply to a God who lives outside of time as you and I perceive it? All time to God is an eternal present. In that sense God does not foresee us doing anything. God simply sees us doing what we do in an eternal present. As Yancey comments, “One day we may see such problems as ‘Did God cause that airplane to crash?’ in a very different light” (p.135).

Paul can admonish us “to be careful how you live...making the most of the time” in light of God’s larger plan for us. In the first chapter of Ephesians our lives and call are grounded in the eternal purpose of God. What is that plan and purpose? Opening the first chapter of Ephesians, he describes it this way; “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love” (1:3-4).

It is this understanding of Kairos time that fuels the management of chronos time, the time within which we live and measure time. We live our lives, make our choices, and seek guidance in ways consistent with God's purpose and promise "through Christ to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven..." (Colossians 1:20). We are, through Christ, part of what God's larger Kairos time is doing in chronos time. God is working to enfold chronos time into Kairos time. Therefore, life in the Spirit of God is life in Kairos time even as we live within chronos time.

That explains why Paul contrasts being filled with the Spirit versus spirits. Interestingly, many people in the ancient world believed that getting drunk could produce inspiration or possession by Dionysius, the God of wine. Remember the account of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the church? Bystanders observed their ecstatic behavior and speaking in different languages, saying, "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13). What was Peter's response? He told the crowd to check their watches. It was only 9:00 AM!

Given all of this, what does it look like for us to "make the most of the time"? A better translation of Paul's word would be, "redeem the time". Though we live in the context of much that we would call evil, degrading, and life negating, we are to engage the darkness of human behavior with lives and works inspired by the Holy Spirit. "Understand what the will of the Lord is...do not be foolish". We exegete our world through the eyes of the gospel.

We are both citizens of the world and citizens of heaven. The church is both a sanctuary and a launching pad for Christ's mission in the world. FPC is an outpost of God's reign squarely placed strategically in Champaign. As a faith community of Christ followers we are called to redeem the times and culture in which we live, not escape from it. Nor are we to succumb to the temptation to be pessimistic and withdraw because the days are evil.

As a community we have gotten involved with the people and nation of Cuba, coming along side our Christian brothers and sisters there, standing with them in witness and faith. We have supported a girl's school in Pakistan, Sangla Hill in La Hor. Through the Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministry and Courageous Conversations, we are entering into dialogue with our African American brothers and sisters by promoting reconciliation and justice. By giving ten per cent of our F-150 dollars to mission, we are supporting the Dreaam Project, reaching out to young African American males. In addition we are working with OI, Opportunity International, to provide funds for micro loans in order to empower people in third world countries.

Our Environmental Committee redeems the time by challenging us to recycle and take care of our environment. Community Mission Deacons redeem the time as they provide back packs for children going back to school. World Mission engages and supports our mission co-workers. On we could go.

Asking with Paul "what the will of the Lord is" falls on all of us. We are invited to do God's will in the eternal now of every day. As Bishop William Temple said, "God is not primarily interested in religion". We find Jesus among tax collectors and sinners and Paul the redeemed Pharisee among Gentiles.

Each are involving themselves in the lives of everyday people, pointing with words and deeds to the power of God's redemptive love in Christ that has now entered our chronos time.

What does it mean for us to redeem the time on a golf course, within the family, in a business transaction, or wherever we may be throughout our day? Paul is saying that the time we have is God's time. It is precious.

We are all hungry for something. If we live only within our chronos time and ignore God's Kairos time, we will substitute something in order to find some meaning and purpose. As Jesus said, "Man does not live by bread alone", but in Kairos time, "by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most, redeeming, the time, because the days are evil".