

July 22, 2018
Psalm 116: 2-12
Mark 6:30-34; 53-56
God's Time; Our Time
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³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed. *Words from God for the People of God. Let us Pray. Bless now my reflections upon this scripture that your living word becomes apparent. In Christ's name, I pray, amen.*

A first-grader asked his mother why Daddy brought home a briefcase full of papers every evening.

She explained, "It's because Daddy has so much to do he can't finish at the office and has to work nights."

"Well, then," said the child, "Why don't they just put him in a slower group?"

Sometimes we all wish we could be put in a slower group. For Christmas last year, I gave Janet a mug that said, "I'm a Teacher; I need a day **between** Saturday and Sunday."

Whether you are a teacher or not most of us can relate. Yet so much of our time is lost simply because we are not paying attention to the life that is happening right in front of us.

To hammer home the point, researchers at Western Washington University recently released the results of an experiment in what is now called "inattention blindness" — a state of such absorption in an activity, that you fail to notice really obvious things happening right in front of you, like a guy in a gorilla suit. In the case of the Western Washington Study, it was a clown on a unicycle, pedaling through an open square on campus. Of the college aged test subjects who were walking by the clown while on their cell phones, (and of course almost all of them were) a full three out of four failed to see the clown — even though many came as close to the clown as ten feet. Nick Paumgarten, "Out to lunch," *The New Yorker*, November 9, 2009. newyorker.com. Retrieved April 3, 2018.

It is therefore perhaps no coincidence that another recent study conducted at Manitoba University in Canada revealed that 70% of North American college students felt acutely lonely during some or most of the school year. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/university-loneliness-back-to-school-1.3753653>

The inability to stay present to the moment marks an inability to be present with oneself, with others, and most importantly – with God – which is the definition of loneliness. In fact, it was the Great 20th Century theologian Paul Tillich who said that being fully present to what is, in this moment, is precisely what marks the difference between Loneliness and Solitude. He says, “Loneliness expresses the *pain* of being alone. Solitude expresses the *glory* of being alone.” Because, he says, “The innermost nature of solitude is awareness of the presence of the eternal upon the crowded roads of the temporal.”

<http://www.mercaba.org/SANLUIS/Filosofia/autores/Contempor%C3%A1nea/Tillich/The%20eternal%20now.pdf>

He goes on: “The walls of distance, in time and space, have been removed by technical progress; but the walls of estrangement between heart and heart have been incredibly strengthened.” Paul Tillich, “You are accepted,” *The Shaking of the Foundations* (Scribner, 1948).

He penned these words in 1948. They are more relevant today than ever. Estrangement is everywhere in our post-modern world; and it comes in no small measure because we fail to be fully present to the prescient, pregnant moment that is now. We instead perceive of time as a commodity that is extremely scarce.

As a result, we divide up our lives and divvy up our time. As Christians, we segment our lives into “God’s Time” and “Our Time”. And of course we struggle to “find time” for God. At best, we schedule a half-hour of Bible study here, a few minutes of prayer and meditation there, and an hour of “worship” once a week.

The problem is not simply one of objective time available but rather one of perception.

Disciples don’t *find* time for God. We, instead, work at trying to discern God’s time in all our time. If we are “in Christ,” then we need to be becoming more and more aware of how Christ’s Spirit fills us and is present *with* us and *to* us at every moment of our day. Disciples of Christ don’t take “time off” from being Disciples any more than our hearts can take “time off” from beating. It is who they are. And that is the message of today’s gospel lesson.

The disciples are sent out 2 by 2 to teach and heal and preach the kingdom. They return and Jesus tells them to come away for a while to a deserted place to rest and pray and worship. But their Sabbath time is interrupted. Before they can quite get there people find them. Jesus does not send them away but instead recognizes that this is simply a part of the call of the moment and God now has other plans for that moment. So he decides to be fully present to them, teaching them many things because he understands that they are like sheep without a shepherd.

Through the eyes of God *in that moment*, Jesus knows *he* is that shepherd.

This does not mean that he ignores the need for Sabbath rest. After all, we are finite creatures with definite limits. It is why God gave us the gift of Sabbath. But being present to ourselves and to God in this moment has the effect of changing our perception of time.

And if I have learned anything in my 56 years on this earth, it is that time is as much a matter of perception as it is an objective reality. Sure, we live finite lives that can be counted in years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes and seconds – but *how* we experience that is something quite removed from the objective passage of time. Where we choose to focus determines our perception, and our perception can either link us to eternity or bring us quickly to what amounts to a rather meaningless death.

The difference comes from being aware of, or oblivious to, what Tillich called the “eternal now.” Tillich brought our attention to the fact that the present moment is a wonder – an eternally occurring piece of consciousness that is both in time and beyond time. This “now” is a deep mystery into which we are called to live fully for it is all we have. It is everything, because in this moment we have our ongoing now but we also have a future that we can anticipate and a past that we can recall. We live the closest to God and to eternity when we are living fully in the now. It is only then that we are able aptly to interpret our past and project a possible future.

The very best way to avoid God is to distract yourself from the present and instead become a kind of hoarder of your time.

C.S. Lewis’ “The Screwtape Letters” is a novel composed of letters of advice from Screwtape, a senior demon, to his nephew, Wormwood, whose task is to undermine the spiritual life of a young man. At one point, Screwtape advises Wormwood to make sure that the man, now a young Christian due to their combined bungling, to regard “his time as his time.”

To regard my time as my time is ultimately a denial of God and God’s claim on me and is the first step toward living an empty life that ends quickly, having left either nothing to show for it or a great deal of destruction in its wake.

Lewis says further elsewhere, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen; not only because I see it, but because *by it* I see everything else.”

That is the view of Jesus and that is the view to which he invites us.

United States Senate Chaplain Barry Black once said, “There is something about continuing to recognize that you are in the presence of God that enables you to keep the baubles of mere time in the proper perspective.”

Black, also a Navy Admiral, says he was once asked, “Admiral, you have two stars, but you advise four-star admirals. Is that not intimidating?”

And my answer was, “It is difficult to become intimidated by someone *wearing* four stars when you are in constant touch with the one who *made* the stars.” —U.S. Senate Chaplain Barry Black, “Chaplain Barry Black Extended Interview,” *Religion and Ethics News Weekly*, June 22, 2007. pbs.org. Retrieved April 11, 2018.

In the same way, it is difficult to be anxious about time when you are in constant touch with the eternal one who lives both in and beyond time. But in this day and age it is so easy to distract ourselves and so easy to forget. It is easy to follow after all sorts of people and things besides the God who lives in this moment and not even know why we are doing it.

In the film, *The Devil Wears Prada*, Andrea Sachs, played by Anne Hathaway is the main character. Her boss, Miranda Priestly, played by Meryl Streep, is the editor of a fashion magazine. Andrea believes that when she hires you as her assistant, she has the right to make unreasonable demands and to call you at any hour of the day or night.

It is fallout from this attitude that sets up a scene between Andrea and her boyfriend. In a heated discussion about the time Andrea is devoting to her job and how it has changed not only the way she dresses, but the way she behaves with her friends, Andrea's cell phone rings.

She looks at the display, then desperately says, "It's my boss. I've got to take this call."

Her boyfriend's reply is, in my estimation, the statement on which the whole film turns. He says, "The person whose call you always take is the one you're in a relationship with."

"So whose calls do *you* always take?" Thanks to Rev. Dixie Voss Anders, First Presbyterian Churches of Colby and Hoxie, Kansas.

When that "who" is not God, we waste chance after chance to live fully serving Christ and our fellow human beings. We should therefore rouse ourselves and focus on the moment at hand.

Once, a hunter in India picked up some pretty stones by a river in the jungle. He used them to shoot at birds with his slingshot, and so one by one they disappeared into the water and were lost. Sometime later, he was in a city and wandered through the market absent-mindedly tossing and catching the one stone he still had left. A jeweler caught sight of it, marveled at such a precious gem and offered to buy it for several thousand rupees. When the hunter recognized the value of his stone, he cried out: "Woe is me! I have been carelessly shooting gems into the river. I could have been a millionaire. But thank God I have saved at least this one."

Every moment of our lives is like a precious diamond. We may have wasted countless moments in meaningless, empty pursuits, so that they become lost in the depths of the past. Christ calls us to wake now, see the value of the moment we have now and use it fully. Sadhu Sundar Singh and Kim Comer, excerpted from *Wisdom of the Sadhu: Teachings of Sundar Singh* (Plough, 2014).

Lutheran pastor, Terry Hershey says, "The problem is that our Western mindset seeks Western solutions: For every problem there is something new to buy or do. We "simplify" our lives by adding more to our [calendars]. We hope to manage life: It gives us a feeling of control. We like the sense of getting our ducks in a row. So when someone, anyone, gives us five easy steps to a balanced life, we're ready to buy. Balance becomes simply a euphemism for control.

"But there's a difference between living in real balance and simply being organized. Balanced living isn't something we do or something we add to our lives. If managing our lives is our

priority, we will certainly be asking the wrong questions: How successful am I? Am I organized enough? Is my life under control?

“We’re doomed because we can’t reach “enough.” So in our pursuit of a balanced life, we live instead by compulsion, obligation and constraint. Here’s the reality: If it’s a compulsion, it’s not balance.” Terry Hershey, “Life isn’t a juggling act: Real balance is about living with grace, passion, purpose and heart,” *The Lutheran*, January 2004.

And the way off the compulsion treadmill? Paying attention to what is right in front of me right now. Hear these wise but simple words of advice from Mother Teresa:

When in her eighties, it was estimated that her ministry had help relieve the suffering of over 42,000 people in India. When asked how she ever accomplished that she said,

“I never look at the masses as my responsibility; I look at the individual.

I can only love one person at a time, one moment at a time — just one, one, one.

So you begin. I began — I picked up one person who in that moment seemed to be calling out to me. Maybe if I didn’t pick up that one person in that one moment, I wouldn’t have picked up the 42,000 in the moments that followed.

The whole world is only a drop in the ocean. But if I didn’t put the drop in, the ocean would be one drop less. The same thing goes for you, the same thing in your family, the same thing in your church, your community. Just begin — one, one, one – right now. Mother Teresa.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, open us up to this moment. Help us to live in your eternal now for it is there that your kingdom exists. It is there that we find all the time we need.

And now bless these gifts that may open up eternal kingdom to others – one person at a time. Through Christ our Lord, amen.