

Making the Most of Our Time

Ephesians 5:15-20

[A sermon preached by the Rev. Stan Gockel at the First
Presbyterian Church of Portland, Indiana on August 16, 2015]

I

Preaching from the Bible can be painful.

Take, for example, today's lesson from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

*“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,
making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”*

As a distractible, attention deficit type preacher, I have troubled focusing long enough to do what needs to be done now.

Procrastination comes easily to a person like me,
and most of the time I have to force myself to stay on task.

On the other hand, you may be the hyperactive Type-A person who doesn't know how to slow down.

If so, you need this text as much as I do.

How are we to make the most of our time in a way that serves God while nurturing ourselves spiritually along the way?

II

Mark Johnson in his book, *Metaphors We Live By*, says that in our conceptual world we live with a debilitating concept of time.

We say things like,

“Time is money,”

“Stop wasting time,”

“This gadget will save you time,”

“I don’t have time to give you,”

“How do you spend your time?”

“I’ve invested a lot of time in her.”

“He’s living on borrowed time,”

“You don’t use your time profitably.”

In other words, we relate to time as if it were money.

The result is that **time has become a tyrant.**

There are two common ways time tyrannizes us:

busyness and boredom.

I remember when I was a child and I would say to my mom, “I’m bored.”

(That’s what kids say about the first of August, which is why it’s a good thing that school started last Monday!)

Mom would say, “Go outside and find something to do.”

Now kids deal with boredom by playing video games for hours on end.

Walker Percy pointed out that the French verb *bourrer*, which means “to stuff,” is the root of the word “boredom.”

Which leads to the question: Are we bored in part because we have so much stuff?

In George Bernanos’ *The Diary of a Country Priest*, the priest speaks about boredom:

“My parish is bored stiff; no other word for it. The world is eaten up with boredom. You can see it all at once. It is like dust. You go about and never notice, you breathe it in, you eat and drink it. It is

sifted so fine it doesn't even grit on your teeth. But stand still for an instant and there it is, coating your face and hands. To shake off this drizzle of ashes you must be forever on the go. And so people are always on the go. The world has long been familiar with boredom, but I wonder if man has ever before experienced this contagion, this leprosy of boredom."

Busyness is our usual response to boredom.

How busy you are has become a new status symbol.

In a world of notebook computers, tablets, and I-Phones, people can stay busy even when off work or on vacation.

But all the electronic gadgets do is add stress to our lives by making us go faster and faster.

Some of this busyness is a way of quieting the demons that haunt the periphery of our souls.

In effect, we allow time to tyrannize us.

St. Paul says, in the King James Version, "Redeem the time."

The literal meaning is "to buy back."

Now we are aware that we cannot buy back time.

I do, however, believe there is a Christian perspective about the tyranny of time that allows us to make the most of our time.

So I offer three solutions for redeeming the time.

III

First, redeem the time by turning down the pressure time relentlessly places on us.

Time's pressure gets to all of us.

Even those with little to do complain about not having enough time.

How many times have I heard a retired person say,
“I’m so busy now, I don’t know how I found time to work”?

Most of us live as if we are playing in the Super Bowl,
our team is trailing by three points,
the ball is on our own 10 yard line
and there’s 45 seconds to go.

The result is a sense of panic.

It’s like the person who attends a time management seminar,
only to lament, “I don’t have time for this.”

A little-noticed change has taken place in our time-world.

The advent of **digital time** has changed the way we act and think.

Some believe it has raised our level of anxiety.

Chronological time has a certain connection to the natural flow of things—
to the rotation of the earth...
and the changes of light and of the seasons.

Chronological time was outside ourselves,
so we could ignore it if we chose.

Not so with digital time.

Digital time has a pulse.

Instead of turning, it beats.

It imitates the sound of the heart and thus insinuates itself into the
body.

More and more, we mistake its rhythmic pulse for our own,
thus mistaking the demands of the world with our own desires.

Time first began to live with us...

now it is beginning to live in us.

For example, a mid-life crisis is a reaction to the pressure of time.

A wife, surprised by the drastic change in her husband, wrote:

“I believe that my husband is either disintegrating or going crazy. My husband has always been a reliable, satisfied, solid person with a good sense of humor and a sense of duty. All at once, in the last few months, his whole personality has changed. All he does is rebel and attack.”

She continues:

“There is something wrong with his clock. He feels time is running out on him. He wants to live now. He needs to find a way to turn down the pressure and stop imagining that time is running out.”

The answer is to live by chronological time rather than digital time.

We need to allow ourselves to slow down and experience the turning of the days and the rhythm of the seasons.

We need to live in the spirit of the Eve Merriam poem:

*There go the grownups
To the office, to the store.
Subway rush, traffic crush;
Hurry, scurry, worry, flurry.
No wonder grownups don't grow up anymore.
It takes a lot of slow to grow.*

IV

Second, to redeem the time is to enjoy the gift of the present moment.

In Greek there are two words for time:

chronos, which is clock time,
and *kairos*, which is the moment of urgent opportunity.

Paul uses the word *kairos* because we are in a moment of great urgency.

“Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!”
 (The Message)

In the final verse of our lesson Paul says making the most of our time means adopting the proper stance for life—
 the open hands of gratitude.

*“...giving thanks to God the Father at all times
 and for everything in the name of
 our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

If we accept with gratitude the time we have
 and live with joy in each moment,
 time will no longer be a tyrant over us.

As Quaker scholar and saint Elton Trueblood once said,
 “Life is lived best when it is lived in chapters.”

I think he means the ability to assign defined boundaries to the segments of our lives will help eliminate anxiety about the past and the future.

When we live fully in the current chapter,
 we are better able to close the previous chapters.

We are also less likely to jump ahead to the future chapters.

If you can allow God to forgive and blot out the past,
 you can live joyfully in the present.

If you can lose yourself in frequent untimed activities,
 you can avoid the trap of always worrying about the future.

You can redeem some time for yourself.

Did you know that yesterday was National Relaxation Day?

How many of you relaxed yesterday?

National Relaxation Day started out as National Slaker's Day in Britain in 2001 but now has caught on in the US as a day to promote leisure and wellness activities.

Here are seven ways to celebrate National Relaxation Day (or any day):

1. Take the whole day off, if possible. Sleep late. Lounge around the house. Just enjoy a lazy day.
2. Read a good book. Watch a movie or TV marathon of something you really enjoy.
3. Spend the day in a place that is peaceful and relaxing—the beach, mountains, lake, a canoe ride, a quiet café, etc.
4. Spend time relaxing on your deck or patio.
5. Take a technology break. Let voice mail answer your calls. Let emails wait until tomorrow. Stay off Facebook and Twitter. Revisit your connection with silence and nature.
6. Visit a spa. Enjoy a massage. Enjoy a weekend retreat in a serene place. Pamper yourself.
7. Do not cook. Order food in or dine out. Take a break from ordinary house and yard work.

Doing these things only one day a year won't do you much good.

Making time to do such things on a regular basis, however, will help us move from the tyrannical pulse of digital time to the gentle rhythms of chronological time.

Then we can live into the spirit of this prayer by Mary Jean Irion:

Normal Day, let me be aware of the treasure you are. Let me learn from you, love you, savor you, bless you, before you depart. Let me not pass you by in quest of some rare and perfect tomorrow. Let me hold you while I may for it will not always be so. One day I shall dig my fingers into the earth, or bury my face in the pillow or stretch

myself taut, or raise my hands to the sky, and want more than all the world: your return.

V

Third, redeem the time by living healthier, more wholesome life.

In a practical sense, that means taking good care of your body.

We can add years to our lives if we...

exercise regularly,
 maintain a proper diet,
 drink in moderation,
 consume less sugar,
 stop smoking,
 reduce our stress levels,
 and worship regularly.

Worship reduces your stress because it is the one hour of the week when you don't have to be in charge.

You can relax,
 tune in to God,
 and let God's Spirit recharge your spiritual batteries.

Taking care of ourselves also means getting plenty of rest.

Rest: that is a powerful biblical symbol.

Did you know that the commandment about the keeping the Sabbath was not originally a religious concern?

The Sabbath was created to give us one day of rest every seventh day.

The ancient Hebrews knew we need periods of rest.

Work and rest are the proper cycles.

The Sabbath is the day God tells people to stop work.

We shed all the pressures, worries, and concerns of work,

and we go home to be with those we love and with God.

What we do every day is hard work.

But work is not the full measure of life.

God gifts us with one day each week as the Sabbath so that we may rest and renew ourselves in God's presence.

The Jewish Sabbath ends with blessings and prayers.

A little wooden box, filled with fresh spices, is opened and passed from hand to hand.

Everyone breathes in the fragrances of the earth.

It is to remind people that while the Sabbath is beautiful and peaceful and holy, the things of the world are beautiful and holy too.

VI

So, my sisters and brothers, do you want to experience the joy and peace and wholeness God promises?

We can if we treat time as a gift rather than a tyrant.

We can have more time to spend with our loved ones and friends by refusing to allow the tyranny of time to constrain us.

And we can set aside one day in our week as a Sabbath—

a day for rest,

relaxation,

renewal,

the worship of God,

and fellowship with God's people..

Here is a good formula for renewal:

"Be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts."

Many studies have shown the therapeutic value of music.

Music nourishes the soul.

When together we lift our voices to God in song,
time stops and we exist for that moment outside of time and space.

We touch the hem of heaven's borders
as we give thanks for every day and everything
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So join with me and together we'll reclaim the gift of spiritual time.

We'll go slow...because, as Eve Merriam wrote,
It takes a lot of slow to grow.

We'll take it easy.

We'll meander for no particular reason.

Refusing to be rushed, we'll open ourselves to the music of the soul.

We'll resist the tyranny of time by centering ourselves in the will of God.

We can start whenever you are ready...there is no hurry.

We have all the time in the world.

Amen.