

**Make Much of Time**  
Pentecost 12, Year B  
Psalm 111:1-5, 10, 2 Kings 2:10-12; 3:5-14  
Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51, 54-58  
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Imagine that you're on the Beltway during rush hour. A car has broken down just up ahead, blocking off a lane. It's summer, and your AC needs Freon. You're driving a relative, who talks your ear off, to a doctor's appointment. You're beginning to feel a bit like a sardine in a tin can, and deep breaths aren't helping.

You look at the clock: can that be right?  
We've been stopped only five minutes?

Now imagine that you're driving down a country lane; you haven't passed another car for miles, and you don't need your AC because it's a beautiful, crisp fall day. The leaves have started to turn: brilliant oranges, reds and yellows. Your best friend is with you, and you're alternately talking and saying nothing at all, simply breathing in the scenery and enjoying each other's company.

You see your destination up ahead and look at the clock: can that be right?  
We've already been on the road *three* hours?

The passing of time is a curious thing; events that stimulate and engage us eat through the hours of a day as though they were candy; those that wear on us gnaw the minutes like a dog chewing his bone.

We focus a great deal of our attention on time; we treat it as a commodity to be managed and spent. Many create elaborate schedules and share them with friends and families through various apps that buzz and beep at all hours of the day and night.

My cousin, Kent, says his four-person family juggles five different calendars, one for each individual and his or her activities, and one color-coded "master calendar" listing everyone's schedules. Lord knows what Steve and I will be dealing with by the time our one- and four-year-old become teenagers and their schedules fill up like my cousin's girls.

Already our son Liam has a detailed school schedule, in which each hour, or increment thereof, is ordered by a specific activity:

8:45 Breakfast  
9:00 Circle Time  
9:30 Small Group Instruction  
10:30 Bathroom Break  
10:45 Snack  
11:00 Recess  
11:45 Lunch  
12:30 Nap

His teachers tell him when to go to the bathroom! They schedule time for him to play and eat and sleep! They order his entire day, which I imagine is both comforting and exhausting to him.

This is the way my cousin, Kent, and I spent our time when we were Liam's age [SLIDE of us in the dirt by the side of the road!].

It's understandable: our focus on time and its passing; it helps us order and make sense of our days; but it's also a protective shield, a means of softening the reality that, regardless how we spend our days, our days, with their passing, ultimately spend us.

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Today's Old Testament reading makes this reality clear ; even the great King David with his long life and long rule eventually succumbed to "sleep," as the translation reads, and is buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem (2 Kings 2:10).

David's son, Solomon, ascends the throne and, because he asks not for riches but for discernment to govern wisely (2 Kings 3:9), God grants him both in addition to honor and a long life (2 Kings 3:12-14).

Then, as now, we humans have been preoccupied with time and the markers we use to quantify it—the hours and days and years; we know we're mortal, and we want to hang on as long as possible!

Just this year our son, Liam, has become aware of and curious about the passing of time. He says things like, "I'm a big-boy now; I'm four. When I was young—when I was two and three—I couldn't do *this, that and the other*, but now that I'm big I can."

He compares himself to Ella, who is "only a toddler," and refers to his 99-year-old great-grandmother as "really old." Steve and I are "medium old."

The other day Liam and Steve went to the farmer's market down the street from our house, and a seventy-something woman rang up their purchases. Liam plaintively asked her, "Are you getting older?" She was gracious: "What made you say that? Is it the gray in my hair?"

Even the youngest among us is preoccupied by time and its passing.

We celebrate fifty years of marriage and ask, "How could fifty years have passed?" "How did we make it together all this time?!"

How is my child four already? How is he older now than Aiden was when I first arrived at Marley? And, how are Chloe, Sabrina and Rebecca, and Scott and Melissa already teens?

To this preoccupation Ephesians advises :

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, *making the most of the time.*  
(5:15-16a)

What does it mean to live carefully and wisely, making the most of time?

The author of Ecclesiastes, thought to be King Solomon, "commend[s] the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun" (Eccl 8:15).

Seventeenth-century English poet, Robert Herrick, echoes the same:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may/Old Time is still a-flying;  
And this same flower that smiles today/Tomorrow will be dying...

Then be not coy but use your time/And while ye may, go marry;  
For having lost but once your prime/You may forever tarry.

A popular t-shirt puts it this way: "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we diet."

To eat, drink and be merry is one way to spend our time here on earth, even a wise and careful way to "make the most of time" if what we ingest is nourishing to body, mind and soul.

I'll explain by way of Ephesians, which differentiates between getting "drunk on wine" and being "filled with the Spirit" (5:18). The verse is not a biblical prohibition against alcohol, nor is my message unless alcohol is an addition; the verse is a question of priorities:

How will we live our lives? How will we make the best use of our time?

Will we fill ourselves with that which doesn't sate us? Sometimes.

Will we fill ourselves by the Spirit of Jesus? Sometimes.

Instead of debauchery—not drink, but debauchery: a way of life that may seem “merry” but is instead deadening—“sing spiritual songs among yourselves, sing...to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God *at all times* and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:19-20).

I find this intriguing, to say the least: according to Ephesians, part of wise and careful living, of making good use of time, is giving thanks to God always *for everything*.

Let me tell you, friends: when Steve and I found out earlier this week that a dear friend has just been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor, I did not give thanks. I expressed shock and tremendous sadness:

Not Anita. How could Anita get brain cancer? Anita is the kindest, most God-fearing, God-loving woman on the planet. And she has a great, bawdy sense of humor to boot!

If anyone should have a long life, Anita should. But, as scripture so bluntly puts it: “rain falls on the just and unjust alike” (Matthew 5:45).

To give thanks at a time like this is not only inauthentic but inappropriate.

No, Lord, I won't give thanks for this, but perhaps, if I turn to you with an open heart, your Spirit will fill me; perhaps I'll live in gratitude if only for the simple reason that its opposite—bitterness—is too much a burden to bear; a truly unwise and careless use of time.

And then there's this: our gospel reading, which connects time to Jesus, “the living bread that came down from heaven”:

Whoever eats of this bread will *live forever*; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh...for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. (John 6:51, 54-56).

Eat, drink and be merry takes on a whole different meaning in light of John's gospel.

Pairing John with Ephesians, then, we get this message: to live wisely and carefully, to make the most of time here on earth, means eating of Jesus' flesh and drinking of his blood. Whether you believe in transubstantiation or interpret this figuratively, the message is this: we are to live by,

through and in Jesus, so thoroughly filled by his Spirit that we become, as our Communion liturgy expresses, “his body and blood for the world.”

What a tall order, what a way to make the most of time.

I don't know exactly what this looks like on a day-to-day basis; perhaps, some days, it looks like falling into bed early and getting a good night's sleep. Other days may look more productive.

But it means, at the least, we order our time to include worship, Christian fellowship, prayer, devotion and service, for in so doing we open ourselves to be “filled by the Spirit.”

Beyond this is great freedom to make the most of time as we see fit.

As Lonnie reminded us in his sermon last week, we live by God's grace and, as such, are free<sup>i</sup>:

But I don't think most people want a grace filled life—we want someone else to tell us what we can and can't do—we don't want to be responsible for that—we don't trust that much freedom or that much grace.

In the context of today's message, I take that to mean that God in Christ has given us a great deal of freedom to order our days and hours and minutes; to determine how to live wisely and how to make the most of time.

The one constant is this: in life, in death, in life beyond death, we in Christ are not alone; thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Clark, Rev. Lonnie. “The Greatest Commandment.” Sermon, Marley UMC. 9 August 2015.