

March 3, 2019

Sermon Series: 24

“Making the Most of Our Time”

Psalm 90:1-17, Ephesians 5:10-17

At the end of this sermon series, and in the context of everything we’ve said about the 24 hours God gives to us – one day at a time – I have a question to help us think about our next steps along the journey of following Jesus: “How might we make the most of whatever time we have left?”

A quick review of where we have been over the last 5 weeks:

1) With Peter, we’ve acknowledged that for God “one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day.” (2 Peter 3:8) In one sense, God stands outside of time and isn’t bound by it. On the other hand, God has entered into real time to be with us and redeem each moment. And, as Peter wrote, He is SO patient with us. Peter says that His patience seems like slowness. He is not driven by the clock, as we might say. But the reason God is so patient is because “He does not want any to perish.” 2) We saw this through the story of Jonah. God wants Jonah (and each of us) to enter into the lives of others – even when we don’t like them or want God to be gracious to them. Jonah’s “one day” (Jonah 3:4) journey into Nineveh – to be with the people he didn’t understand or love well – followed by his willingness to say what God wanted him to say, led to the repentance and redemption of an entire city. 3) We exclaimed with the Psalms that “one day in God’s presence is better than a thousand days elsewhere,” (Psalm 84:10) and then heard the testimony of some of those sacred moments in people’s lives. And in the middle of this worshipping and witnessing we’re called to do, God calls us to Sabbath; to cease. We are called to join God in His rhythm of work and rest (Exodus 20:11). We are also commanded to stop working as a reminder we are no longer slaves to Pharaoh (Deuteronomy 5:15) or the modern task-masters of production and accomplishment. Finally, scripture reminds us that we serve a present-tense God who provides daily manna (Exodus 16) and invites us to live THIS day (Psalm 118:24) as fully as we can, without Looking Back in regret or Looking Forward full of worry.

In light of all we have looked at, let me ask again: “How might we make the most of whatever time we have left?” Last week’s message was a reminder that we don’t actually know what our exact ‘time left’ will be. The point of reading today from Psalm 90 wasn’t to embark on a study of the life expectancy long ago (“70-80 years” in v.10). The punch line comes after that: “So teach us to count our days, that we may gain a wise heart.” (Psalm 90:12) God wants us to live wisely as we live out our days – one 24-hour period at a time. Paul may have had this very Psalm in mind in his 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.” (Ephesians 5:15-16)

There is a lot of darkness and light language leading up to these verses about living wisely. Paul is suggesting that a lot of people live their lives – spend their time – “in the dark.” And clearly, Paul has a lot of dark behaviors in mind which he goes into detail about throughout this letter. But I think he’s getting at more than just doing the right/good or wrong/bad thing. Like the Psalmist he goes beyond mere behavior to wisdom.

I want to read the same two verses from The Message translation and then add verse 17. It reads like this: “So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times. Don’t live **carelessly**, **unthinkingly**. Make sure you understand what the Master wants.” (Ephesians 5:15-17 in The Message)

Can we talk about these desperate times? Careless times? Unthinking times?
[And our response to them?]

When it comes to responding to culture, I think the Church tends to make two equally harmful errors. Either we disengage from the problems and darkness around us – feeling people deserve what they get or heaven will make it all go away without needing us to get our hands dirty; or we magnify the evil around us and become paralyzed with anxiety – acting like God can’t handle it or refusing to acknowledge many have faced (and are facing) much darker times. Either way, if we disengage or become anxious and paralyzed, we’re not able to be a part of God’s Kingdom work of transformation. And He doesn’t need us to help Him, but He does invite us to be a part of recreating life “on earth as it is in heaven.”

I think we can all agree nobody celebrates desperate times, or the darkness underneath the difficulties. But we’re still called to make the most of our time. I came across this little piece of dialogue in *Fellowship of the Ring*: “I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo. “So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such [difficult and desperate] times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

Are people desperate right now? Absolutely. Are people careless and is their carelessness causing more desperation. Yes. Is thoughtlessness on the rise? It sure seems that way. So how will we – by the power of the Holy Spirit – make the most of our God-given time, energy, and resources to **replace** the darkness (and desperation) with light, the carelessness with carefulness, and the thoughtlessness with thoughtfulness?

“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 5:15-16)

We are entering the season of Lent – the 40 days not counting Sundays, beginning this week with Ash Wednesday and taking us all the way to Easter. For some of us this is a familiar rhythm and

for others it just sounds like what we find in our belly buttons and between our toes. For this Lenten season, we're going to build on the biblical understanding of time and the 24-hour days God gives to us. We're going to be in the Gospel of Luke and look at One Day in the life of Jesus; actually, we'll be looking at several of the "One Days" Luke mentions.

I encourage you to participate in our Ash Wednesday service, to be reminded that Jesus spent 40 days fasting and praying in the wilderness before He began His public, day-by-day ministry. On Wednesday we will acknowledge our brokenness and compliance with the evil and injustice around us. We'll stop trying to point out the darkness all around us and get honest about the darkness inside us. [If we really want to make the most of our time we should start with self, and work from there.] And we'll receive the symbol of ashes on our foreheads as a sign of repentance and preparation.

But before we do that, we're going to spend these next moments remembering another day at the end of Jesus' life. Actually, it was an evening [His last evening alive]. It was Passover and Jews from everywhere had come to remember how God had delivered them from the darkness of slavery in Egypt.

These were also desperate times. Rome was about as brutal as Pharaoh. The Jewish religious leaders were about as thoughtless and careless as one can imagine. And Jesus' followers had no idea what was coming. So, with time running out, He "made the most of the time" remaining.