

“Redeeming the Time” – Ephesians 5:15-20 – August 19, 2018

Rev. Rachel A. Wann

Time is a precious commodity. We all have said, “I need more hours in the day.” We fret because there is not enough time, or time seems to be passing us by too quickly. There are other occasions when the time seems to drag by – like when we’re sitting in the doctor’s office watching the clock or waiting to hear some very important or serious news. Then time seems to drag.

Our lives are often ruled by time. Our bodies function in a 24 hour cycle. But in our hectic, on demand kind of world, for many of us it often seems like there just isn’t enough time to get everything done. We push ourselves to the point of exhaustion, trying to fit it all in.

When the Apostle Paul was ministering to the Gentiles in Asia Minor, he believed that Christ was coming back quickly. His mission had a sense of urgency about it, because there was much to be accomplished before Christ’s return. Because of this expectation, Paul was opposed to the concept of idleness or wasting time. There was much to be done, no time to waste.

Now Paul was not a fan of busyness for the sake of busyness. He would probably shake his head in dismay if he were to witness those of us who try to juggle so many things – family responsibilities, church work and volunteering, job pressures, leisure and sports obligations, and the various clubs and civic groups to which we belong. To Paul the work of Jesus Christ was paramount. Everything else paled in comparison

In our passage from Ephesians, Paul is cautioning the church to make the most of the time that they have been given. Time is running out, he said, so don’t live as the foolish people live. Live as wise people. Now what does that mean? Who is wise and who is foolish? In this letter, Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus to explain to them how to live as Christians. Earlier in the letter he had used imagery of putting off or taking off the old self, and clothing themselves in Christ. Because they are now Christians, they are to put aside what he calls the foolishness of the world. If they are to be wise, they will follow the will of the Lord. Throughout this whole letter, Paul has been helping the Ephesians to understand what it means to follow God’s will and live this new life, into which they had been baptized.

And now, because time is short, at least Paul believes it is, he is urging the church to quickly adjust to their new role. Make the most of the time, or redeem the time, as it is sometimes translated. The Greek verb that is used here most commonly is used in the marketplace. The verb redeem has the image of a shopper quickly grabbing a bargain. Just like we redeem

coupons at the grocery or department store when we shop. The bargains don't last long, so grab it while you can. Redeem it before time runs out.

Now we can look at this from our own perspective and see that Paul was inaccurate in his belief that Christ was returning as soon as Paul expected. Here we are 2000 years later, and it seems like we have all the time in the world. Looking at the entirety of our lives, we seem to have plenty of time. Why this sense of urgency? Does it really apply to us?

Have you all noticed this phenomenon? The older we get, time seems to pass by more swiftly than in younger years. As a young person the saying, time is fleeting, used to bewilder me. But now I can feel its truth, before I know it, a decade has passed by. Perhaps Paul's message of urgency is not so out of place for us.

People who have been diagnosed with life threatening illnesses oftentimes get to the point where they look at the time they have and treasure each moment. When life suddenly has an expiration date, the hours of each day become more precious to them and their loved ones. They understand Paul's words – redeem the time, grab it up before it slips away, make the most of the time.

Yet for all of us Paul tells us that moment is now. Redeem the time now. Live your lives as that new creation. Put on that new life, bestowed upon you at the moment of your baptism. When we look at the hectic lives so many of us lead, there often doesn't seem time to include Jesus Christ in the mix. We'll give him Sundays, or at least a few Sundays a month. Let me live my life for awhile in my own way. Give me these years to be in control and go the direction I want to go. Then when things are finally where I want them, when I've finally raised the kids, gotten that dream job, paid off the mortgage, and set aside that comfortable nest egg, then I will put my attention on Jesus Christ.

Problem is, life isn't always that neat and tidy. You raise the kids, then all of a sudden, they're back under your roof. You spend years laboring for that one organization, yet one pink slip changes everything. Household expenses pile up, and suddenly you're looking at a second mortgage. Or the nest egg you've worked so hard to build is severely depleted by an economic downturn. Or you receive that one diagnosis that changes everything. Suddenly 30, 40, 50 years have passed. And as you look back over your life, trying to sum things up by decades, Paul asks you, where was Jesus in all of that? Where was God's will in your life?

How will you respond?

Paul writes to the Ephesians, be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise. Don't live as the worldly ones live. Live as a new creation. Live as imitators of Christ. Make the most of the time, because the time is short.

Don't get drunk with wine, Paul writes, because that is debauchery, instead be filled with the Spirit. First, what Paul is not saying. He is not condemning the consumption of alcohol. Here Paul is not saying that we can't enjoy some down time engaged in leisure activities with our friends. What Paul is condemning is a lifestyle of pleasure seeking. Of putting one's own selfish desires first. In other places Paul condemns idleness. This is similar. Don't waste the time you've been given. Don't fill it with meaningless activities that in the end have no substance. Don't live according to what the world says is okay. Leisure activities are fine in moderation, even necessary. Just don't get yourself in the habit of putting your wants and desires before all else. For Paul, that is foolish living.

Instead be filled with the Spirit as you sing spiritual songs together and give thanks to God. Paul is making two points here. To make the most of the time, to redeem the time, engage yourselves in activities of worship and do so among the community of the faithful. Worship God together. When we worship God, our minds and hearts are obviously focused on God. The more we worship, the more exposure we get to God, the easier it is to be in tune with God's will for our life.

Now here, worship can take on a variety of forms. It goes beyond what we classify as Sunday morning church. Worship is active. It requires us to do something, not simply sit back and passively let things happen. In worship we are to be engaged, actively reaching out to God. Paul specifically mentions singing and giving thanks. When we sing or praise God, we are reminded of God's greatness. Our praise invites feelings of awe and wonder at all God has done.

As we experience the power of nature, or as we take in an art exhibit or a musical performance – as we engage our senses in these activities beyond ourselves, we find ourselves drawn to the Creator, to the one who gave us the beauty of the natural world and the appreciation for artistic endeavors. In those moments when we experience God as Creator, we can offer up our praise and thanksgiving. We can even find ourselves stirred by a powerful work of literature or an athletic performance that seems to defy natural human ability. When we recognize those moments of excellence, those moments that take us to a place of awe, we come into contact with God, and those are powerful moments.

And the more in tune we are to God, the more we live our lives in an ongoing attitude of worship and thanksgiving, we will come to see God even the simple things. The blooming of the flowers in our garden, the joy of a litter of puppies or kittens, the kindness of one stranger to another. And as we imitate Christ in our own lives, as we reach in love to others, there too we experience the presence of God. In the simple acting of handing a bag of food to someone at the food pantry, of looking that person in the eye and giving a smile of encouragement, we have worshipped God.

The other aspect of worship and thanksgiving that Paul talks about is doing it in community. When we worship and give thanks together, we build one another up. We grow together. We are accountable to one another. We recognize that we cannot do it alone. Certainly there are many times when we are alone in our experience of God as we go about our day. But there is something special about being able to share our love of God with another person or a group of people.

It is in the community of faith that we are supported and pushed and held accountable. We are the body of Christ, and we are brothers and sisters to one another. This is our family, the ones who love at our best and at our worst. It is in the community of faith that we belong.

Paul writes – time is short, so don't live as the foolish live. Be wise. Grasp a hold of that new identity, live into what it means to be a Christian. Worship and give thanks and enjoy life in the community of the faithful. That is what Paul means by making the most of the time.