



“MAKING THE MOST OF THE TIME”
SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 5:15-20
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
August 15, 2021, Hybrid Worship
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Ephesians 5:15-20

5:15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,

5:16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

5:17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

5:18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,

5:19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts.

5:20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word of the LORD
Thanks be to God.

Making the most of the time in three parts.

PART ONE: Be Productive

What are the lessons you’ve learned about time? What is it for? What counts as a good use of it? How does it get wasted?

“Time is money.”

Those three words define the opening sentence in an essay called “Advice to a Young Tradesman” written by Benjamin Franklin in 1748:

Remember that Time is Money. He that can earn Ten Shillings a Day by his Labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that Day, tho' he spends but Sixpence during his Diversion or Idleness, ought not to reckon That the only Expence; he has really spent or rather thrown away Five Shillings besides.

Remember that Credit is Money. If a Man lets his Money lie in my Hands after it is due, he gives me the Interest, or so much as I can make of it during that Time. This amounts to a considerable Sum where a Man has good and large Credit, and makes good Use of it.

Remember that Money is of a prolific generating Nature. Money can beget Money, and its Offspring can beget more, and so on... The more there is of it, the more it produces every Turning, so that the Profits rise quicker and quicker.

...In short, the Way to Wealth, if you desire it, is as plain as the Way to Market. It depends chiefly on two Words, Industry and Frugality; i.e. Waste neither Time nor Money, but make the best Use of both.

It's stitched into the founding formation of the United States of America that time is money. Wasting time is essentially wasting money, or the opportunity to make money or pay a debt or work to create something that will generate more money.

Franklin was raised a Presbyterian, but wasn't really a church goer. He often evoked theological language in his writing and speaking. The ethic of work and industry and frugality were, he believed, divinely sanctioned--as evidenced, for Franklin, in resulting wealth. Achieving wealth was, Franklin believed, in the end a sign that God ordained it. He ended this essay with the words:

He that gets all he can honestly, and saves all he gets (necessary Expences excepted) will certainly become Rich; If that Being who governs the World, to whom all should look for a Blessing on their honest Endeavours, doth not in his wise Providence otherwise determine.

Franklin, one of the founding fathers, was a slave owner for most of his adult life. He enslaved two people, George and King. Also, the newspaper that Franklin owned, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, regularly ran advertisements for

the sale of human beings and for indentured servitude contracts. Franklin's words about industry, frugality, and wealth applied to white men. And more and more slavery created a moral dilemma for him.

A few years before his death, Franklin became an active abolitionist, convinced that Black children had the capacity to learn just as much as white children. He freed George and King and petitioned Congress to outlaw slavery and support measures to integrate previously enslaved people into American society.

Time is money has a complicated history--loaded with the assertions and assumptions that the superior relationship to time is one that cloaks it with the opportunity it brings to generate wealth. The sense of urgency that we have learned is one of the hallmarks of white supremacy culture is there for a reason--time is a money maker.

"Time is money" is a multi-faceted hypocrisy. In the midst of slavery and the injustices persistent through the generations around whose time actually ends up generating whose wealth. And then again in the way this call toward productivity is a doorway into another kind of bondage for all of us.

The freedom that Franklin wanted open to all people is a fraught one. Is there freedom in an economy where our worth as a human being is tied to our earning capacity. Is there freedom in being a commodity in a market that benefits so few? "Time is money" commodifies all of us in an economy that sees the value of all of our bodies and our spirits as directly correlated to the money we can make--either for ourselves, but most often for someone else.

How does that "time is money" formation live in you? How deeply do you believe that time spent working--and working in a way that generates income, is the most virtuous use of your time?

Our sense of time is snarled up with our sense of worth. Making the most of the time in America is quantifiable and, therefore, always looming over any time of rest or ease--time not working can become lost time, not real time. Have you ever said you have to get back to reality when you come back from a vacation or resting? As if rest takes us out of time, and work is the only way time counts. That's time as money at work in our spirits and souls.

Making the most of the time

PART TWO: Be Positive

What are the lessons you've learned about time? What is it for? What counts as a good use of it? How does it get wasted?

As people of faith, Paul is telling the Ephesians that they should have a different relationship with time than others in the culture did.

In fact, Paul writes, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,

making the most of the time, because the days are evil."

Paul makes a distinction in Ephesians between what Jesus followers know about time and how Jesus followers live in time. The "evil" of these days is not that time itself is evil, but that the world does not yet know the full satisfaction of God's vision for humanity. These days are in between time, threshold time, time that is waiting, expectant, anticipatory. Finite and incomplete. For Paul here, evil is deprivation, lack.

Paul calls on the Ephesian faithful to embody their wise way of life, their making most of the time by, "sing[ing] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts,, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In other words, Jesus followers are focused on a different clock than others are--they find ways to give God thanks in all circumstances because what's happening right now isn't the whole story--what's happening right in front of us is deprivation, lack, evil.

Just like most of scripture, this passage has beautiful truth and that truth comes on a razor's edge--with all kinds of dangerous ways to interpret and weaponize and misuse and appropriate.

This message can be mistaken for a way to excuse the injustices and suffering we see around us by both detaching from it and by assuring those most impacted by it that they will get their reward in heaven.

There's another danger here, however, even if you don't take it as permission to detach from being present to the suffering of our time. And that is somehow to think Paul is telling us we always have to think positively or look on the bright side. That somehow we are wasting time if we lament or grieve or admit that we are weary or need to just be sad or even despair sometimes. Remember a few weeks ago we talked about how Paul's message to the Ephesians was a powerful testament to his witness in that city--the faithful there trusted him. And there were also those who really, really didn't like what Paul was doing. Paul wrote to that community from real pain. The praise he is calling them to is not disconnected from the painful realities of the life of faith. Paul gave his life up for the truth of God's love for all. And he and others endured hostility, threats of violence, and actual violence because of the way of life Jesus called them to together.

And yet still, there is a strong strain of Christianity alive and well in every different kind of church there is, that tells us that being faithful means always being hopeful, or that being faithful means never really grieving or never really touching into despair. Anyone who has lost a loved one has been offered some piece of that positivity gospel--they are in a better place, we shouldn't cry we should celebrate, be grateful for the time you had, you will get through this.

The idea that being positive is the best use of time can become a source of shame when we find ourselves blanketed in grief. We cajole ourselves to "snap out of it," "get over it," "move on." We are wasting time if we aren't happy or grateful or hopeful or cheerful.

Gratitude is a much more nuanced thing than positivity. And faith is strongest when it is unafraid of hard truth. Time and truth come together to transform.

Making the most of the time

PART THREE: Be Present

What are the lessons we are learning about time? What is time for? What counts as a faithful use of time? How does time get wasted?

What if each moment is a gift? What if each moment is a miracle hoping you will notice? How much of time is lost when we only value it's production value or when we push ourselves to "look on the bright side" to convince ourselves we have made the most of the time?

Yesterday morning, a beloved and wise person in the Grace Covenant community got in her car and drove to one of her favorite overlooks on the Blue Ridge Parkway. She had a vision of the peace that was awaiting her--she had her coffee and her chair and her heart ready for rest, for beauty, for quiet tranquility and a beautiful sunrise.

When she arrived she found something very different than she expected. Instead of quiet tranquility there was a man there with his music blaring from his car. She felt "instant resentment" that her plan had been disrupted and the space was not what it should be.

Instead of leaving, however, she set up her chair and made a conscious choice to bless the resentment, disappointment, and irritation she was feeling and let it be felt so that she could eventually release it.

Almost immediately after she sat down with this intention to feel what she was feeling and open her heart to releasing it all, the man popped out of his car, put on rollerblades, and began doing an interpretive dance to the music as the sun rose over the mountains.

"It was so beautiful", this GCPC sister in Christ shared with me. She went on to say, "That coyote Christ--always inviting us into unexpected gifts in the moments when we just stay open."

If you know Nancy Gaskin at all, you know that she faithfully practices this openness in her daily life--in challenges and in ordinary moments. Nancy wouldn't want me to use her as an example of wisdom--that resistance to thinking of oneself as wise is often a really clear marker of a wise person--they don't see themselves as wise, they see themselves as always learning and growing.

Nancy went on to tell me more of the miracle of this moment she had yesterday when she stayed present to her disappointment and irritation and to the invitation to trust God's ability to make each moment a miracle of truth and transformation.

Nancy's older brother had a crippling stutter—it was extreme, and it “othered” him from grade school on, Nancy told me. The pain he endured was very difficult for Nancy and her family to witness. But in the 11th grade, her brother discovered skating and was at a roller rink several nights a week. There, because of his skill, grace and great sense of rhythm, Nancy's brother found community for the first time in his life.

So yesterday, Nancy ended up talking with the man on the skates on the Blue Ridge Parkway. They had a great conversation. Nancy said, “Watching him skate refreshed that memory [of my brother] for me so I texted my brother about it and how grateful I was feeling that he had found this community. For the first time ever, [my brother] shared that [skating] literally saved his life.”

It turns out that in the conversation Nancy had with the guy skating on the Blue Ridge Parkway, he told Nancy that he grew up with a speech impediment, too. He shared with her that he attended a mostly white school and a mostly Black after school program, where he was ‘othered’ in both. Terry told Nancy that dance/skating was a saving grace for him.

Sacred time is the collapsing of time--past, present, and future become immediate to each other and God stitches together the beautiful threads of pain and promise, hurt and healing. And we can see the world differently. We can see ourselves in the world differently.

I am grateful that Nancy trusted me to share this story with all of you. She hopes it is an invitation to all of you to share your stories of God's power to transform time--and transform the way we take up space in the time we are given.

Grace Covenant, our shared story through this pandemic has come to this moment--today. A moment where we are once again invited to consider what it means to faithfully orient ourselves to time. We have collectively been moving through all kinds of feelings and strategies for coping. It's been a journey--and we have learned and grown so much together.

Just when we thought we were getting to the beautiful ray of hope that COVID could be waning, we get to the place we thought we were going and it's nothing like we were hoping for. Instead of finding ourselves on the verge of things opening up, we are seeing things need to shut back down.

The delta variant is a demoralizing reality and an ominous marker of time--17 months into the COVID 19 pandemic and the virus has found new ways to stop humanity in our tracks. Time is bewildering--as each day the case numbers climb and new data comes in about breakthrough infections, how contagious this variant is, how it impacts children differently, and what protection vaccines actually afford not just to those vaccinated but to the world in general.

Making the most of the time becomes a stressful kind of race against time itself. How do we anticipate what's going to happen in three weeks, four weeks, six weeks so we can prevent worse case scenarios from coming true? How will we get through this difficult time? When will we ever get to better days?

Making the most of the time for us right now, Grace Covenant, is about letting the pain and the promise of time teach us anew what it means to be faithful right here, right now. Together we are learning anew how to be in time faithfully.

Each moment is a miracle waiting for us to notice it.

We're tempted to think we're wasting time, biding our time, waiting for a better time, trying to pass the time...

God is calling us to make the most of the time by simply being here. Be here with whatever it is that is here and whatever it is that you feel. The God who called the mighty oceans and these majestic mountains and multiple solar systems into being, is able to bless this very moment with a healing opportunity. The question is not whether God makes the most of the time, but are we willing to trust God's power to do that enough to make the most of the time, too.

Thanks be to God.