



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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NEW YEAR'S EVE

December 31, 2014

“Now is the Time!”

(Psalm 90:12)

Rev. David K. Groth

“So teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12).

Collect of the Day

Eternal God, we commit to Your mercy and forgiveness the year now ending and commend to Your blessing and love the times yet to come. In the new year, abide among us with Your Holy Spirit that we may always trust in the saving name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen

“Time flies when you’re having fun,” someone said. It also seems to fly faster and faster, the more of it you’ve experienced. Have you noticed that . . . the law of accelerating time? The longer you live the quicker it passes?

Have you also noticed how young those people have become who play professional sports? It wasn’t long ago that all the NFL players were older than me; they were wizened and mature men with impressively hairy arms. Then, suddenly they were my peers. Then, for a couple of decades, I thought of them as just slightly younger than me. Finally, a few weeks ago, the camera was on Corey Linsely, the rookie center for the Packers. He had taken off his helmet and I came to the devastating realization that he’s about the age of my daughters.

The mystery is that time keeps moving, and if we don’t know that, or if we invest all our energy denying it, trying to hold it at bay, we are going to make some foolish mistakes. I see girls in my confirmation class trying for all their worth to look like they’re 20, while their mothers are trying to do the same, and somewhere in the process a lot of life is lost.

“Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” the Psalmist wrote. Know what time it is. Know what time of your life you are currently living. Be aware, recognize, be appropriate and graceful about the time of your life.

Psalm 90 is a personal favorite. We read it together earlier and Isaac Watts turned it into the hymn we just sang,

“O God, our Help in Ages Past”. Psalm 90 is at its heart a corporate complaint to God, a communal lament.

It begins with the requisite praise.

“You have been our dwelling place for generations.”

“From everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

A thousand years in your sight are as a day gone by.”

Then the Psalmist gets down to business.

“You turn us back to dust.”

We’re about as substantial as dry grass.

The years of our life are seventy, maybe eighty, yet their span is but toil and trouble.

So help us do what we need to do. Help us to number our days so we may gain a heart of wisdom.

There is in the scriptures something called a “Wisdom Tradition.” Wisdom is highly valued in the book of Proverbs, for instance, and Ecclesiastes. When the Bible speaks of wisdom, it doesn’t really mean having a lot of knowledge or skill. That’s a modern and Western definition of wisdom. The Wisdom literature of the Bible is more related to virtue and teaches us how to live well.

A wise heart in Psalm 90 is one who knows what time it is, who lives creatively and responsively and appropriately in the time of his or her life. It’s one who remembers the past and has learned from it, but does not sanitize it in his mind as the good ole’ days or yearn to live in the past again. Those days already served their function, and the Lord is trying to do new things in your life. On the other hand, the wise heart anticipates the future, and looks forward to it, but knows better than to pretend that’s when real life will begin . . . once I have my driver’s license, or once I get a better income, or when I’m finally able to retire.

The foolish person, is one who does not know what time it is. A fool, in biblical terms, would be the one who denies the movement of time, who ignores aging, for instance, who clings desperately to the past, or who

longingly waits for the future and in the process alienates himself from the present.

Psalm 90 is traditionally listed as a prayer of Moses. I think of him late in his life, when he came to the Jordan River. He looked across and saw the Promised Land, the future which he had been pursuing for most of his adult life, and he knew he wasn't going to make it over to the other side. He personally was not going to cross the river and enter the land of milk and honey. He could only see it from afar. He could remember the past, and look a little into the future, but really the present was all he had.

And so it is for us. We can remember much of the past and look a little into the future, but the present is what we have. So we need to know how to deal within "the now" of our lives, to be wise with our time today, tonight, now.

Life is short and the future uncertain. The time is now, and the risk is that we waste the present time. We waste it on that which is not important. The risk is that we become stagnate, bored, stale. We stop learning, stop growing, and stop trying. The opposite of all that is to keep the zest for living until the day you die, to stay interested, keep your curiosity, your sense of wonder, and learn new things. Care enough about the world and others that you are willing to take risks and to reach out.

So teach us to number our days. How do we do that?

First, assume responsibility for the time you've been given. Whatever time of life you've been given it is for you – it's yours. Own it. There is only one person who can live your life. Sounds simple enough but often we are inclined to act as if we are victims of fate, or time, or of someone else's life . . . instead of being the responsible adults in charge of our own lives. Remember the law of two feet. If you don't like where you are, move. Don't complain, worse yet, don't sit there getting angry. Move your feet.

Second, numbering our days includes knowing there are limits. There is a limit to the time we've been given and there are limits to what you can do with that time. There are responsibilities we have toward others, not just ourselves.

That too seems simple enough and yet we have a lot of trouble with knowing there are limits. A part of biblical wisdom is numbering our days and acknowledging there are some things you can't do, or control, or fix.

Many of us have resolutions going into the New Year. I recently ran into a quote about them from Mark Twain: "Now is the accepted time to make your annual resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual. [Today] everybody smoked his last cigar, took his last drink, and swore his last oath. [Tomorrow] we will be a pious and exemplary community. Thirty days from now, we shall have cast our reformation to the winds."

We have trouble with limits and healthy boundaries, don't we?

Third, because you will not live forever, don't put off the important stuff. It may not be today or tomorrow, but there will come a time when it is too late. Martin Marty kept a plaque on the wall of his study that said, "Life is short and we have not much time for gladdening the hearts of those who travel the way with us. Oh, be swift to love, make hast to be kind." Knowing what time it is means sifting through all the countless ways you could spend your time and deciding what you most want and need to do and start doing it. Among the important things to do is tell those you love that you love them. "Oh, be swift to love."

And fourth, be a factor in the future. Give yourself – your time, your money, your ideas and leadership. You won't take anything with you, so find what you care about and give yourself to it.

Finally, one of the things that Psalm 90 does is point out the brevity and frailty of our lives in stark contrast to God's eternal strength. From everlasting to everlasting he is God. We, on the other hand, are like a dream that seems so real but then disappears in the morning. We're like grass that flourishes in the morning but by evening is withered.

Is that all there really is to us, a flash in the pan sort of existence . . . and then nothing?

We Christians have recently celebrated the birth of a

child. We celebrated it because we believe this child's birth, and more specifically his death and resurrection have broken the grip that time has on us. That child would grow to be the one who would free us from the strangle hold death has on us. Our lives are not merely running down and diminishing. What we believe is the opposite: that because of Jesus whose birth we just celebrated, all our days matter, and because of what he did, our days do not pass away under God's wrath. Job lamented, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope" (Job 7:6). Some people choose to die that way, but God has given us another alternative. God has *given* us a different way to live and a different way die, and that is to live and die trusting in him. Because he died, our sins are forgiven, and because our sins are forgiven, death has lost its sting; time has lost its grip. Because Jesus lives, we too shall live. He is our Alpha, and he will be our Omega. Jesus is the road on which we travel. He is our companion along the way. He is where we began, he is the journey, and he is our eternal home at the last.

The ancient lament of this psalm is that we are like grass that soon fades and withers. We are like a dream that disappears in the morning. But Jesus is God's answer to the ancient lament. Because of Jesus, and his life, and his death, his resurrection, because of your baptism and this supper, because of his grace, the ancient lament is finally resolved and the promise fulfilled.

"O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home." Amen.

