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Easter 3 A, April 23, 2023

“Jesus – Our Joy – The Highest Use of Time”

Read: Romans 13: 11 – 14, and/or Memorize: Romans 13: 11

If you knew you were going to die tonight, would that cause you to change your use of time today? I suspect, most of us would say “Yes!” A man had a friend, named Art, whose doctor diagnosed him as having a terminal illness. He told him that the illness would claim his life within a year.

A few months later, the doctor discovered he had made a mistake and called Art. He explained that he had made a terrible mistake and his condition was not terminal after all. As Art reflected on the months he had spent under his mistaken death sentence, he acknowledged the negative, painful emotions he had experienced.

But he also reflected on the very positive emotions. Here’s how he explained it, “I began to see the beauty of God’s creation the way I hadn’t seen it before.” He went on, “With the length of my life limited, I began to make the most of every moment.” That’s always a wise decision for us to make, to make the most of every moment.

There are many things that might be limited but certainly time is one of them. Every minute has sixty seconds; every hour sixty minutes. Every day has twenty-four hours; every year three hundred sixty-five days. Yes, I know, every four years we get one extra but you know that as well as I do.

If you multiply three hundred sixty-five by eighty, which is the age that God talks about being a good age for people; and add in 20 leap days, we get 29,220 days. If you are forty years old, you have used up 14,610 of those days. I hope you have used them wisely because you may only have another 14, 610 in your bank.

So, we want to be good stewards of time. We want to use the time we have for its highest good. Being a good steward of time doesn’t mean you have to always be working or doing what we normally think of as religious things. Jesus didn’t see life that way.

After all, He went to a wedding, often got away from His disciples for a little time to pray. Here’s how Paul expresses our good stewardship of time: “Whatever you do, do all to the Glory of God.” Bringing God glory is one of our primary functions.

Like many English words, our word time is can have a variety of meaning; we have to figure out what it means when use it. Whereas, in Greek, there are two words for time. One is chronos which refers to the ticking off of the hours, days, years. It is (insert time, day, year) .

The other word is Kairos which refers to the special times when God acts decisively or presents us with a special opportunity. Those special circumstances have great meaning for us. Most parents remember not only the date of birth of a child, but the time and circumstances. That's all Chronos.

You also likely remember the feeling of being tired for a long time after that birth. When that first child is born you went from just being a husband or a wife to being a parent. In that place you have entered Kairos, a season of time, for the rest of your life. You will always be a parent and they will always be your child.

This morning lets focus on some biblical truths that can help us to be better stewards of our time and use it for the highest purpose. Our first truth is: time is God's good gift to be gratefully received and enjoyed.

What a wonderful gift time is. It is called the substance of life and a precious asset. It is an opportunity for gathering, growing, giving and going. In those times we can find love, fulfillment and joy.

One of the things I love as we gather for worship is the hum that happens before worship actually begins, as people gather and talk. The other thing I love to hear is laughter. There are so many people who think that Christians don't ever laugh or can't have any fun.

It's such a shame that they think that. The Psalmist had a spirit we could all use when he declared, "This is the day that the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it." That theme should open the door of our hearts to gratitude.

The other thing is that time is an equalizer. As I said earlier, all of our time is measured in the same way for our life. No one gets slighted. If they get an hour it's sixty minutes. If they get a day it's twenty-four hours.

We often pride ourselves on being busy people. We say or we might hear others say, "I don't have time to do this or that." The truth is, we always have time to do the things that are most important to us. The issue is not do we have time but rather, will we make the time. How will we allocate or parcel out our time?

In a real sense, time is a vital part of our stewardship because we cannot create any more of it. It is God's gift, entrusted to us to use wisely. We want to pray daily that great prayer of the psalmist, "Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Another biblical truth about time is: time is a limited opportunity to be used wisely. That is perhaps a sobering thought. James reminds us, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend the year there and trade and get gain, whereas you do not know tomorrow, what is your life, for you are as a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"

Perhaps it would be good for us to take stock of our time. Someone used a measure to give us a sense of life. Assume you live to be eighty. Then the various hours of the day you will reach can be compared to the hours of the day. You are born at 6 AM. If you are ten years old, it is 8 AM and breakfast is over; if you are twenty it is 10 AM; if thirty, 12 Noon; if forty 2 PM and lunch is over. If fifty, 4 PM; if sixty 6 PM; if seventy 8 PM and supper is likely over; if eighty it is 10 PM and the time is approaching for the end of the day or of life.

So how do we want to use our time? One of the wisest ways we can use our time is to glorify God. Paul reminds us in Romans 13, "This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." Paul also says to make the best use of our time to walk as wise people because we are walking in a time of evil.

I've heard people express the thought that this time is more evil than other times. Yet, wonder about this. Since we fell into sin, all time has been marked by evil. It always has temptations and Satan is always a danger. How we use our time reflects our understanding of how God wants us to use it. God wants us to serve Him, by serving others, which is the highest use of our time.

We also want to remember that one of the greatest things that use up our time is procrastination. We put off until tomorrow what we could do today. We can live under the illusion that there is a golden age somewhere out beyond where we are today. As we dream of that, we allow great experiences to pass us by today. Now is the time to live, laugh and serve God and others.

We don't want to spend a lot of time wasting that time. Now, I'm not saying you fill up every moment doing stuff. But that you look at your life and establish what your priorities are according to God's leading and direction. And then apply yourself to those things.

We all face the dilemma that there are many good things in life that we might like to accomplish. What can we do that will bring the most glory to God? That's the thing that we want to invest our time in, because we do not know when our time will end.

Here's another truth that can help us be better stewards of time: time is but a prelude to eternity. The Wall Street Journal had a column on how we waste much of our time dreaming about an ideal situation that will never be realized.

We might fantasize about it and think it as something we want to accomplish in our later years. However, there is no guarantee that we will have later years. So, if there is something we feel God is leading us to, we want to apply ourselves to it.

Jesus said, "This is eternal life. To know You, the only true God in Jesus Christ who You have sent." Eventually, we will run out of time, unless we build our lives on Christ's love. Then we have a whole eternity ahead of us.

Eternal life doesn't begin when we die. It is ours when we turn our lives over to God through Jesus Christ. No time is wasted when that happens. We fulfill God's purpose for us when, in the words of that great hymn, "When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word," ... and remember that it leads us to "trust and obey."

In return, God asks of us only what He knows we have the ability and time to do. God asks that we love Him with all our hearts, minds, and body, while also loving our neighbors as ourselves. That's the best use of time. That is our true worship of Him in all His glory.

Count me in: Plan to carry out a special service for someone this week.