

You Know What Time It Is

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Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

Sunday, August 16, 2020 (NURC webpage)

I will be preaching mostly from the letter of Paul to the Romans, paying particular attention to verse 11: "Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep."

In preparation for this sermon, I began to study time and what we do with it.

Pre-COVID, Americans spent over seven hours sleeping and over eight hours working. The rest of the time was spent on leisure sports, household activities, eating and drinking and other things. And 1.1 hours are spent on caring for others, on an average day.

For older Americans, 65 and over, most spend 4.2 hours watching tv and a lot less time on reading, socializing and communicating, relaxing and thinking, and other leisure. If we define our lives by how we spend each day, then it would have to be a life of work and sleep with little time in between to share with others because we are busy with household chores, sports activities or reading.

We Christians get caught up in this concept of time at the church also. All churches function on a calendar year. Today, we are in our 14th day of Pentecost and on November 28th, we begin a new time, a new year which begins with advent and continues until we reach Pentecost again at the end of the year. So we have days, months and years and this is how we live, according to time.

Today, we gather again (online) on a long, hot summer to continue to do the work of Christ, to continue to get fed and hopefully to continue to carry out the mission that our foremothers and forefathers did in this church since its establishment, to bring the gospel to all peoples at all times.

Sadly, we gather today missing someone whose time has been cut short. We come together grieving our pastor, EJ Emerson, who taught us about the love of God and fellowship among us and now called into eternal time. She now becomes part of the concept of time as we read in the bible stories.

In the book of Romans, Paul was speaking to a community of believers about the same thing Pastor EJ was preaching all along; about the love of God and fellowship among us.

Like those before us, the people of the Bible were aware of the passage of time. They were not as detailed as we are today with clock-watching and tight schedules. They used to mark time by the duration of the seasons.

Time was more holistic for them. It's like they felt time, it was a part of their inner clock. All their time units were based on observation and experience. So, the day was divided up into watches measured

by the position of the sun in the sky. If you

read in Gen. 14 it says, *“During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud.”*

Years were counted by the cycle of the season, and months were counted one moon from the other, not necessarily 30 days. By far the most important unit of time was the day and the most basic unit was intuitive experience. And early on, the Israelites counted the day from morning till evening, or, counting the night in between from one morning to the next. And because they used the rising of the moon for festival observances, they later came to count the day starting from the evening, which is still the Jewish custom for today, sundown to sundown.

What is important for understanding the biblical view of time is the fact that days were not just counted, but were identified by their most significant event.

Throughout scripture we hear “the day of rejoicing,” “day of salvation” and expressions that commemorate the quality of experience for that day. Again, if we return to our time, the quality of experience of our days are spent in front of the television, on the internet, and in traffic jams. Our experience of time is not joyful.

As time passed in the bible (no pun intended) time began to mean different things to different people. Remember, that many people rebelled in the bible and steered away from God. So, all events and moon festivals and watches of the night and day were not spent on God anymore.

For instance, the Babylonians believed time to be a heavenly decree, fixed so firmly that even the gods were forced to submit to it.

They watched the constellations and like clock-work knew when good or evil will appear. When the moon is in the seventh house and Jupiter aligns with Mars... The stars were stars, the people were people and there was no connection to them or to their past, just submission. So life was based on the stars, the zodiac signs and they saw no ultimate purpose in human striving. Why live to be good, the stars will determine our time.

So why am I giving you a history lesson on time? What does this have to do with us in this church today? I'm telling you this because you need to know what time it is on your watch. You need to know what you believe about time before you get to know the time of Christ and how important it really is in our lives. You see, Paul was speaking to a group of Romans, the biggest empire with the most active and busy people.

They had no time to listen to what was coming, they only focused on the here and now. And some of them came from the Babylonian viewpoint on how meaningless time was. So talking about God and what God was going to do in the distant future, was not something they had time to hear. They may have even been tired of hearing the same old story: God gave them the law from Mt.Sinai and he was God's people and they were to keep his Law.

The people went back and forth between the promise and the fulfillment. You get tired of waiting sometimes for people who promise you something and don't pull through. But, God was ever present with them. Every time they started to backslide, God sent a warning yet renewed the promise of grace for the future. So, the past is a mirror of the future, showing the troubles and opportunities that are yet to come.

This pattern makes us commit once again to God. God loves us so much that he sent Jesus, in His time. After a long age of waiting and despair, the Jewish people began to see the fulfillment of God's promise in the Messiah.

Finally, the time has come. And people were rejoicing, until he died. The resurrection brought about everlasting life.

That promise still lives. At the time Paul was preaching, Christ was not long gone from the earth and they believed he was coming back real soon.

So, Paul, in the letter to the Romans was telling people, “you know what time it is,” Jesus is coming. Paul was saying to the Romans, and reminds us today, that the age to come is of goodness. Aren’t you ready to hear some goodness in the midst of this pandemic? It is the fulfillment of the law. We must be transformed in many ways. We must put on the lifestyle of the age to come as we put on our own clothes. You know that phrase, all dressed up and nowhere to go?

Well, we know where to go. But, are we dressed and ready?

Are we spending our time wisely? Paul tells us it is high time for us to wake up. It is time when more is expected of us than in the times of our ignorance. It is time to wake up for the sun has been up a great while and shines in our faces. Paul tells us it is a busy time, we have a great deal of work to do and God is calling us to it again and again.

Know that the time is a perilous time. We are in the midst of enemies and snares. It is high time to wake up. I know what time it is.

Paul tells us also to take off our pajamas that we have been wearing since the lock down and put on new clothes for the day. Put off your night clothes, cast off the works of darkness. If you are undressed you are unarmed for the day. The graces of the spirit should be your armor to

secure the soul from the temptations of the day. I know what time it is. It is time to put on the spirit and grace of Christ. Jesus is the best clothing for Christians to adorn themselves with. It is decent, distinguishing, dignifying, and defending.

To prepare for the time of a new day, Paul tells us how to walk. I know what time it is when Paul says to live honorably. When we get all dressed up, we are not to stay at home in our own privacy. What have we good clothes for, but to go outside with them? Walk so as to please God honorably, not in quarreling and jealousy, not in the divisions we experience today.

And to do this Paul says, it must be done in love. We must owe no debt but the debt of love. The word love is often used to sum up the whole gospel, the whole meaning of life, suffering and death of Christ, the whole content of the Christian message is summed up in love.

We are told in Corinthians that without love, no deeds-not even the greatest deed of giving oneself as a sacrifice-would count for anything. Without love we are nothing. The beauty about love is that one cannot love by willpower alone. No one can tell herself, "Now I will love" and then proceed to love (believe me, I tried it). Love is beyond our control. Love is simply there.

I want to sum up this message this way: the more we wake up, ready for a new day, with love in our hearts, ready to go out there and work for God, the more we achieve freedom from our daily routines and freedom for loving others. After all, this is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew. He said whatever problems you are having with your spouse, your kids, your neighbors, your community, your church, go and fix it.

And if you can't fix it, find others who can help you along the way. Set aside your differences this new day and learn to love. And when you do this in my name, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you by MY Father in heaven. Father, Son and the spirit will be ever present with them. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

We have a new day in this church. We have the loss of our dear pastor. We have a new and improved worship space. We are reinventing ways of being a church. Time changes things that come and go. But, know for sure, that God's love doesn't change. Today, we wake up to the new realities of our congregation and our community. It is time to wake up, dress up, walk out there, and begin to love one another as Jesus himself modeled for us. For this is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.