

## INI

Ephesians 5,15-21  
Trinity 20 — 9 October 2016

**Greeting:** To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, which was read earlier:

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, <sup>16</sup> redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

**So far the reading. Let us pray:** Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Introduction:** Today, I'd like to speak about time.

We all know about time, but it is a difficult concept to define. But even if it is difficult to define, we all know about time.

It seems we all have the same amount of time. For all of us, the second hand on our watches sweeps by at the same rate. The seconds accumulate and become minutes, the minutes become hours, the hours become days, the days become years.

But time seems to move at different rates for different people. For example, if I'm visiting the dentist, a half hour can seem a lot longer than thirty minutes. We can remember the cry of children, "I don't have anything to do; I'm bored." And sometimes for that child, time seems to drag by. Yet at other times, time seems to fly. And as we get older, time seems to fly by at a quicker and quicker rate.

Time is God's gift to us. In the opening chapters of Genesis, we read of God making the lights in the sky to mark the day from the night, and these were for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years. Seasons. Days, Years. All are signs by which we mark the passage of time.

But if time is God's gift, it is a gift that can be used wisely or foolishly. Saint Paul speaks about the wise and foolish use of time in our text. He tells us to "redeem the time." Another way of saying that might be "buy back the time." What does he mean, "buy back time?" How can we buy time? If we can buy it back, from whom is it bought? What is the cost of time?

These aren't questions for an accountant, but they are questions that touch each of our lives. This brings me to my sermon theme for today, "**Proper Time Management**." I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) God's Gift Of Time**
- 2) Redeeming The Time;** and,
- 3) Living In Redeemed Time**

**1) God's Gift Of Time.** Time is part of God's creative Word. When God began creation, time began. In the beginning, God created; God came out of the eternal now, and with that coming out and with God's Word, time began. That work of creation stands in time. And of the moon and the sun that were created to govern the day and the night, God looked and saw that it "was good." All of the rest of creation was good as well. It was all good. Everything was working the in way in which God intended. Everything was working in time, and it was good, because everything was working harmoniously.

Yet we know that even though God intended His creation for good, evil entered into world. We know that the serpent, the devil, our old evil foe, came up to Eve and told her of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,

"For God knows that in the day – in the day, a moment in time – that

you eat from it your eyes will be opened – will be opened, the future tense, another reference to time –, and you shall be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3,5)

And sure enough, Adam and Eve took the fruit, chomped down, and their eyes were opened. But instead of knowing good and evil, they came to the realization that they were naked before each other and they stood naked before God as well. And because of their unrepented sin, God cast them from the garden, and told Adam,

Cursed is the ground because of you;  
In toil you shall eat of it  
All the days of your life. (Genesis 5,17)

Now, instead of everything working harmoniously in time, things worked against Adam and Eve and their descendants. Thorns and thistles competed in the fields for grain. The results of sin work in time, and humans work against time to earn their daily bread. And for all of us, time works against us as well, for at the end of life stands death – when our time on this earth quite literally has sun out.

But in time God also did not abandon His creation, for in time He gave our first parents a promise, a promise that would be fulfilled in time, a promise of a Savior who would redeem them. To the serpent God said:

And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise you on the head,  
And you shall bruise Him on the heel. (Genesis 3,15)

One day, when the time would be right, at the decisive moment, the Seed of the woman would stomp on the head of the serpent, would conquer that serpent and all that the old evil foe could bring against humankind. But to accomplish this work of redemption, that Seed would also be bruised,

would be stricken, smitten and afflicted, and at the decisive moment, in death, would take on Himself the sins of the world. But for a world that had now been plunged into sin, into sin with the pall of death hanging over it, that moment would be in the future, when God would be pleased to work in time.

**2) Redeeming The Time.** At the decisive moment, at a specific point in time, the Seed, God's own Son, Jesus Christ our Savior, went to the Cross, and on the Cross redeemed us, redeemed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil, and redeemed us from the forces that would separate us from God, but also redeemed the time in which we are to live.

But if God works in time, so also do sin, death, and the devil. These great enemies of ours also work in time. And they can make it appear as if time is our enemy.

We age and get old. Time seems to fly, and as we get old, it seems to pick up speed. Who of us hasn't said, "My, where did the time go?" And yet for most of our lives, we would be fooled into thinking that we had all the time in the world.

When it was on TV, I used to watch "The Red Green Show." During one episode, for example, Red was musing about reaching middle age (actually a bit more, after all how many people do we know who are a hundred years old). He was saying that perhaps it was time to go to church, to stop putting off using Sundays for golf or fishing or anything that would keep him away. But then the thought flashed through his head that God is in the forgiving business, so, the conclusion, there's plenty of time, now where are my golf balls and my fishing rod.

While the example is humorous, it is evidence of the power of sin in our lives. It is the power of the devil who would come and snatch the Word of God from us by turning our very selves away from God so that while we seemingly do not technically despise preaching and God's Word, we do not hold it sacred and do not gladly hear and learn it – or perhaps we would hear it on our terms, but only when its convenient in time.

The amusements of this world are used by the devil to turn us away from God and the life He offers. Paul warns us against drink, against wine in this case, which can lead to dissipation, to its use to numb us to the passage of time.

People seek escape not only from God's word in amusement, but also in the solace of numbing themselves to the effects of sin in this world. Numbing themselves to the effects of sickness and loneliness and despair. Seeking escape. But any escape.

To be sure, God gave people the gift of wine. Indeed, the psalmist declares that "wine makes glad the heart of man" (Psalm 104,15) and Jesus' first miracle was to turn water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. But the nature of sin, the nature of the world, and the activities of the devil are to take God's gifts and turn them on their heads, and instead of being gifts that are part of our daily bread, they become means of escape by which we numb ourselves to God and His grace.

This numbing, this fleeing from God and His Word, is foolishness, and this foolishness results in death and not in life. Make no mistake, we kill ourselves and kill our relationship with others and kill our relationship with God. We live in dissipation, of wasting away, of frittering away our time. All of us, by nature, possess a natural foolishness in regard to time.

**3) Living In Redeemed Time.** But God has rent the fabric of time itself, He has torn it apart, and come into our world, not just in creating us and the time in which we live, but also to live with us, and so we can and do live in redeemed time.

Moses, in Psalm 90, prays:

Lord, You have been our dwelling place – or refuge – in all generations.

Before the mountain were born,

Or ever You did give birth to the earth and the word,

Even from everlasting to everlasting You are God.

You turn man back into dust,  
And say, “Return, O children of men.”  
For a thousand years in Your sight  
Are like yesterday when it passes by,  
Or as a watch in the night.

So teach us to number our days  
So that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90,1-4.12)

Time is the theme of Psalm 90, and I hope you caught all the references to time. Time marches relentlessly on. We find out soon enough that we do not have “all the time in the world.” For each of us, death will come and quite literally for us time will stop; our watches will stop ticking.

So in the midst of that Psalm, Moses prays

So teach us to number our days  
So that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Luther translated that Psalm with a bit more punch to it, and probably closer to the original intent:

Make us know that we have to die  
So that we may become wise.

Perhaps the face of death itself will convince us that none of us has all the time in the world. Where do we get wisdom to find life in the face of death, to redeem the time?

Wisdom comes from God’s breaking into time and showing us the Cross of Christ. As Paul writes to the Galatians:

But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made

from a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them – to buy them back – that were under the Law – which is you and I – so that we might receive the adoption of sons. (Galatians 4,4-5)

At the right moment, God ripped apart the fabric of time to live with us as we are, and, ultimately, to die our death. And all time is compressed into that redeeming work, into that buying back, buying us not only back, but buying back the time in which we live.

The wise use of time then is the filling of the Spirit that permits us to build one another up “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,” in other words, using our words to reflect the fact that the Word became flesh, and lived among us.

In the midst of time, God gave us a day of rest to reflect on Him and His saving work. This is part of redeeming the time.

**The Third Commandment.** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. (Luther, *The Small Catechism*)

Our time is redeemed or bought back as God gives us the opportunity to gather around His Word, the Word which we hear, the Word that is sung, the Word that is eaten at the Lord’s Table.

There are many words for time, but the meaning that Paul has in telling us to “buy back time,” is to “buy back the moment of decision” to “buy back the decisive moment.” But it is not we who have first of all bought back time, rather, it is Jesus who came to buy it back for us. Thus, the time of buying back, of being bought back from sin, death, and the power of the devil, is God’s gift to us in Christ.

We nourish that gift each and every day and we publicly celebrate it together. We share the gift of life, of forgiveness among us.

**Conclusion.** There is a joke. Man comes to God and asks God. “Is it true that for You a thousand days are like a second and a penny like a million dollars?” God: “Yes.” Man: “Can you loan me a penny?” God: “Sure, wait a second.”

Thank God that God did not come to us on His terms, in the eternal now, but came to us in time. He redeemed time – He bought back time for us. It’s His gift. In time He worked out our forgiveness at Jesus’ expense. He has given us the Word of Forgiveness to open our eyes to the wise use of time, the time that has been bought for us so that we can proclaim the Word of the Lord in our midst. Even though our time on this earth will come to an end, thank God our time with Jesus will last forever. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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