



In 1734, the famed Puritan preacher,
Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon
on redeeming time.

I was shocked to find out
that even 285 years ago,
faithful people were wrestling
with what to do with the time
they had been given.

I read through a good bit of that sermon,
though it is a tad repetitious and lengthy.
Those Puritans liked a good (long) sermon.

I'm trying to imagine Edwards,
in his colonial white wig
and tightly buttoned black waistcoat,
bellowing out,
"Though all time is very precious,
yet some parts are more precious than others;
as, particularly, holy time is more precious
than common time.

Such time is of great advantage
for our everlasting welfare.

Therefore, above all,
improve your Sabbaths,
and especially the time of public worship,
which is the most precious part.

Lose it not either in sleep,
or in carelessness,
inattention,
and wandering imaginations."¹

¹ <https://www.apuritansmind.com/puritan-favorites/jonathan-edwards/sermons/the-preciousness-of-time-and-the-importance-of-redeeming-it/>

Hmm...Sinner take note...

Now I have to confess

I don't necessarily buy into
the demarcation between sacred
and profane or ordinary time.

I don't know that I view
this time we spend together here,
anymore important
than the time you spend with your family
or time we spent on a hike
—though I do wish you all hiked on Saturdays
or spent time with your families
on Sunday afternoons...
I mean momma's gotta work!

But declaring some time

more sacred than others
—well what I really think we mean is
that there is a difference
in our awareness of time.

There are times when I am more open
to the holy that is *always* present
for me to notice.

It is a sacred to pause time
to watch your baby sleep.

It is a sacred time
when you sit on your front porch,
early in the morning with your coffee
—still and calm.

And it is sacred time when you are here
singing with 75 other people,
singing!

Mary Oliver, the poet, penned,



Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be Astonished.

Tell about it.

But time, is ever slipping from our grasp, isn't?

What are the two things

we think we don't have enough of?

Time and money.

#truth

Apparently Socrates once said,

beware of the bareness of a busy life.

And he was alive way before 1734!

I quoted Annie Dillard in a sermon

not too long ago,

"How we spend our days is,

of course, how we spend our lives.

What we do with this hour,

and that one,

is what we are doing."²

How we handle our time

creates not only meaning in our lives,

but it also dictates a sense

of morality we have about time.

A British sociologist points out,

"People tend to be very moralistic,

rigid and defensive about their own,

and other people's, time keeping behavior."

The norms surrounding punctuality

are unforgiving.³

² Annie Dillard, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/530337-how-we-spend-our-days-is-of-course-how-we#targetText=%E2%80%9CHow%20we%20spend%20our%20days%20is%2C%20of%20course%2C%20how.a%20net%20for%20catching%20days.>

³ Ibid, pg. 5

Ask Tripp sometime how I feel about
his punctuality.

Grace is indeed in short supply
when it comes to someone else's time keeping habits
—especially when they bump up
against our own.

In terms of stewardship,
“how we live *in* time
shapes the quality of our relationships
with our innermost selves,
with other people,
with the natural world,
and with God.”⁴



Our ancestors relied much more
on the natural world that we do.
Darkness and light dictated the passage of days;
falling leaves,
piling snow,
sprouting tulips
and growing watermelons
determined the seasons of their years.
But nowadays, we are largely removed
from the natural world.
I groan when it is time to rake leaves.
I belly ache when the snow
sticks around for days
and means muddy paw prints
on the kitchen floor.

We have more windows painted shut
than I'd like and I'm so thankful
for working air conditioning in my car.
So no matter what time of the year it is

⁴ Dorothy C. Bass, Receiving The Day (Jossey Bass, 2001 preface, xii)

I control enough of my environment
to have little reliance on seasonal changes.

Aside from my allergies,
I'm not very involved with the seasons.
I'm aware of them,
I mean you can get themed Oreos
for any season, people,
but I'm not involved in the seasons:
certainly not dependent on their passage,
not dependent on the journey of time
like our great-great-great grandparents
would have been.

And it what me wonder what I,
what we might be missing,
when it comes to time
and its rhythmic change throughout the year.

Because there is a pattern,
a habit to time's passage
that might serve as a template for our lives
for patterns and habits to develop
to receive time as a gift.

My lack of involvement with time as gift
has made me more like a dictator of time.
I view time in terms of usefulness
and efficiency
time is of the essence—how can it benefit me?
What control or management
can I implement onto time?

Because I don't think I'm the only
who operates this way,
it begs the question,
don't we need to develop life patterns and habits
so that we aren't just more efficient
in our *living into time*
but also living "with greater authenticity
as human beings created in God's image?"⁵

⁵ Ibid, preface xiii



Every year in June the PCUSA
sends out paper calendars, like this one.

But not this year.

This year they were late.

Not because of an ordering mishap on Mary's part,
but because on the whole
the PCUSA sent out the calendars
later toward fall.

There were all sorts of FB posts on the Young PCUSA Leaders page...
where are the calendars;

are they still making them;

anyone checked with the national office in Louisville?

We were a little beside ourselves here,
in several staff meetings

concerned about how much we needed
our new calendars.

We had events to plan
and programs with start dates.

Part of our staff meetings each week
is going over the calendar
so we don't miss anything
or book two things

at the same time in the same place.

You all know what I'm talking about.

But all this organizing and scheduling
has taught us to look at time,
as though we own and control it.

As though it is just this box on my calendar
or this rectangle in my planner.

We have taught ourselves
that time is a puzzle or problem

to be worked out
something that can be
manipulated and pieced together
to comfortable fit
our own picture and reality.
Mary, our church bookkeeper
and administrator says with frequency
and sometimes a blunt firmness,
when there is a scheduling error,
'it is already on the calendar;'
it is her way of saying,
this time is set in stone.
unmoving, unwavering,
this piece of the puzzle only fits here.



We have two calendars at home,
one is just for pictures and the other,
the other is white board calendar
with all our activities (or most of them)
on our refrigerator.
You see, we are the masters
and mistresses of time.

Time is something I can manage and control,
it is you see, theses little boxes and blocks
and the activities I put in them.
I'm sure you are like me,
and sometimes when you are looking at your
calendar
with all the things written inside,
don't you secretly wish for a few more blocks?

If I had more time,
if I had more blocks on my calendar
I could do more.
Just last night,

a church member was talking about
how things at his workplace were stretched;
“we just need 2 more hours in the day,
don’t we?” he pined.

If only we could have
more space on our white board
because there is nothing on any of my calendars
that says, *read*.
There is no mark on my calendar
that says, *rest*.
It isn’t that I don’t do those things,
but I don’t do them as often
as I do things that I do write on my calendar,
like Family Ministry meeting
or take Huntley to dance
or bring an appetizer for the LR tailgate.
You see if it is on the calendar,
I’m more likely to do it.
Are you like that too?

Dorothy Bass in her book,
Receiving the Day, writes,
“Busy people may think
that what we need
is a few more open boxes
on the pages of our datebooks.
But in fact that would only provide
a flat and short-lived remedy,
and ***not only*** because
those boxes would soon fill up like all the others.
What we really need
is time of a different quality.”⁶

⁶ Ibid, pg.3



Time is one of the first things that God creates,
calling the light forward
and separating the light from the darkness;
naming the light, day and the darkness, night,
God creates a rhythm and cadence to creation.
It is the first gift,
a balance of time
—for work **and** for rest.

Time has more to give us than we think.
We say, time flies.
We blink and another year has gone by.
Just this week,
a former youth group member of mine,
from when I worked at Rumble Presbyterian in Blowing Rock,
passed away from cancer at 32.
Stanley Hauerwas says that,
“Death creates an economy
that makes certain things valuable
in a way that would not be valuable if we didn’t die.”⁷

This is so true and I don’t want to be that preacher
that stands here to say,
what if you die today...
but here’s the thing I do want to say,
time is so precious.
It is a gift from God.
Perhaps in today’s busy, beyond hectic world;
in our society’s rigid, unrelenting

⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, The Economy of Death, <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/the-economy-of-death>

managing of time;
in a culture that sees all of time
as workable instead of a balance
of work and rest;
perhaps *time's gift* is worth redeeming.

“Time is not our enemy
but our meeting place
with God and one another.”⁸
And sometimes that is saying
the same thing.

Our time of worship
isn't more sacred
than other times of our days.
But what is unique about this time here
is hopefully the quality of time.
So let me make a case
for the time we spend here.



In this place when we are here
and therefore giving of our own time to be here,
we've agreed
that will work hard to be present.
We have an agreement,
I think,
that we will work hard to be attentive.
We will, together,
create times of silence:
for prayer, for meditation, for rest.

We will be sensitive to the times
when we need to hold each other up
and we will sense when the time

⁸ Dorothy C. Bass, [Receiving The Day](#) (Jossey Bass, 2001 preface, xii)

is right and speak the truth.

We will give each other the space and time
to agree and disagree.

We promise to use the time we have together
to teach, to nurture,
to change diapers
for each other's children.

The quality of time we practice here,
even briefly then,
can be a model
for the time we spend
away from here.

Redeeming time,
might start with a priority
to make time to be here together.

And then while we are here,
we practice spending quality time together.

How many of us
spend too much time at the office?

How many of us feel like
we spend too much time on the road?

How many of us
spend too much time
on our phones, tablets and laptops?

How many of us spend too much time at church?

Sarah, Katherine we can't raise our hands.
Ha.

When it comes down to it,
time, is something we give to each other
that lasts.

Many of you with teenagers
will say that for Christmas
you want to give your kids experiences,
instead of things.

What is an experience,
but time spent together?

To decided to go against
the structuring and control,
the constant organizing and management of time
in our culture is not something we can do alone
...that is a task
too much for individual shoulders.
We will absolutely have to have each other
—that might be
what makes our time here spent together
even more important.



Psalm 90 is said to be a song of Moses
when he was atop Mt. Pisgah,
looking down into the promised land.
The time of wandering was over,
and Moses is close to death.
He knows that the work he has done
of leading the people in the desert,
was over.
Perhaps some of his work
was even teaching the Israelites
over those 40 years about time,
about God's time.

But the work that lay ahead
would be carried on by someone else.
Teach us to count our days, O Lord,

Moses declares over 4000 yrs ago, and in doing so,
echoes our own longing for redeeming time.
Remind us, that we are here only briefly,
and we are not in control of time.
But we are given it as a gift.

The divine task is to live into time
with the authenticity of our created-ness
and to find the balance of work and rest,
together.

for you O Lord, have been our dwelling place for generations.
“Only a dwelling place of the breadth and depth of God
can finally count and hold
all the days, weeks, and years of our lives”
throughout our history.⁹

Where does God dwell?
In us.

The Puritan preacher was right (285 yrs ago),
in his instructions to improve our Sabbaths,
not as a day of rest
but as the quality of our time
together.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us
And prosper the work of our hands...
so that we live into the gift of time.

⁹ Dorothy C. Bass, Receiving The Day (Jossey Bass, 2001 pg.121)