

Sermon preached at St Stephen's Uniting Church, Macquarie Street Sydney on 16th August 2015 by Rev Ross Smith. Lectionary Readings: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Psalm 111; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58.

Making the Most of Our Time

“These are evil times” asserts today's text from Ephesians. Would you describe our times today differently from that? How discerning, how wise, do we want to be?

Solomon heard God say “I give you a wise and discerning mind” (I Kings 3:12). He had asked for an “understanding mind” that would enable him “to govern God's people.”

Some of our minds no doubt discern large scenarios of evil in our world such as war between Muslims in the Middle East and in North Africa. We recognise the evils of colonisation which feature one country taking over the lands and resources of other peoples, or agreements which carve up territories into so-called nations which do not reflect the original tribal or cultural groups.

It could be said that everywhere we need to pray for the wisdom and discernment to govern our world so that there might be peaceful and sharing relationships instead of the wars and destructions that are current. “Act like people with good sense and not like fools,” (Ephesians 5:15 C E V).

In John (6:57-58) we read: “Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven...”

Here we have a reference to God and Christ, which H Richard Niebuhr says is understood to refer to the universal and the particular. In other words, we always have presented to us the broadest possible reference to all that is and also to the particular situation or person or thing.”

So we remember Jesus talking about the first important commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind...The second most important commandment is like this one. And it is, “love others as much as you love yourself.” (C E V).

We often abbreviate this to “love God and love the neighbour.” The universal and the particular.

I have always been captivated by the expression of the evangelist in John 17:3 “Eternal life is to know you the only true God and to know Jesus Christ, the one you sent.” (C E V)

Eternal life is called in Greek ai-on-ian life. Not quantitative but qualitative. A life of abundant joy. A fulfilled life, filled with the joys of sharing, of celebrating each other. Of sharing in the abundance that is around us and in us.

To not have this context to our life (the universal and the particular) and to not know the living God and the living Word of life, the bread of heaven, is to be as Ephesians puts it, to be “immoral, indecent and greedy.”

Here the writer is not addressing the spectacular wars between nations or groups, but to what appears to be personal qualities found in the Christian community in Ephesus and elsewhere.

But the list in Ephesians at this point refers to much more individual, banal and unspectacular brands of evil. In 5:3 it says “don't let it be said that any of you are immoral or indecent or greedy.”

A picture is painted in our mind of something deeper than the surface meaning of the words: that we are foolish, because we go from one mistake to another, acting as though we had no direction or worthwhile purpose in life to hold us together and to make “every minute count.”

We can disguise our lack of direction and aim by being busy and engaged all the time we are not sleeping. Filling up our time with busyness and activity, we say.

Even on holidays we manage to fill up every second with activity so that we eventually need to go back to normal work routine to get some rest.

Some people say they're too busy to come to worship. And what about us? Do we sit here and start thinking about what we must do on Monday instead of focussing on joining in with gusto in the celebration of life that worship is meant to be?

Our immorality, indecency and greed has to do with the way we don't use every minute to advance further the onset of the kingdom values that Jesus embraced and modelled for us. The honouring of God and neighbour.

We need to get off the treadmill of busyness and pause and reflect on what really matters in life.

These things that matter most are our relationships, not just in and through our families, but how we relate with the people in our street, work and recreation.

We can also look at how we relate to and talk about our fellow members of this congregation and the wider church and other faith groups.

There may be a significant amount of immoral, indecent and greedy behaviour in our relationships that needs to be addressed.

We need not to fill up our time, but to fulfil time, to redeem moments so that we may, instead of being busy with our own stratagems, understand and do the will of the Lord.

So what are we supposed to do to fulfil the will of the Lord? And we may ask, what is the Lord doing with this time of ours?

If we think like the writer of Ephesians, God is making nobodies into somebodies, breaking down walls that divide, light is entering darkness and disclosing the hiding places of the bullies and self-important.

“Light shows up everything just as the Scriptures say. Wake up from your sleep and rise from death, Then Christ will shine on you.”(Ephesians 5:14, C E V) We can make every minute count!

It is important that we are aware of God's presence among us in shaking the foundations of these evil times. Instead of keeping our time focussed on our time, we can keep time with God.

Not how we can fill our time, but how can we use God's time? If we look at the way we are using or wasting our time, this may lead us to order our days differently and not let unimportant things crowd out the really important things in our lives.

We may be even bold enough to say “Praise the Lord!” I have life, I have spirit. I have God's presence in my life. I have opportunities, I have options. I can build relationships. My life is not humdrum or ordinary.

We can sing a song which has a vision of a new world because we become filled with the Spirit. We can confront this sad and cynical world by “making melody to the Lord with all our heart.”

“You are people of the light because you belong to the Lord. So act like people of the light and make your light shine.” (Ephesians 5: 8,9. C E V). Every minute counts!

We can join in a prayer from our Synod newsletter for redeeming our time:

“Holy Wisdom, you granted Solomon's request for an understanding mind
and the knowledge to discern good from evil.
Fill us with such understanding and knowledge
that we may act as instruments of your loving desire for creation,
working with you to transform our conceit into concern for others,
our fear into love, our violence into peace
and our brokenness into wholeness.” Amen