

THIS IS THE DAY

Matthew 6:25-34

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When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we say, "Give us this day our daily bread", and usually we focus on the bread, on God's provisions for us. Today I'd like us to consider just the first part of that phrase: "Give us this day." God has given us this day. Each day. In the Psalms, we can read a verse many of us learned as children: "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Throughout the Bible, we see references to the gift of time, and to the ways God wants us to think about and use time. This verse comes from Ephesians: "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time."

What does that gift of time, of this day, mean? How do you feel about the way you use your time? Are you guilty when you feel as if you've wasted time? Do you feel virtuous when you feel as if you've used your day wisely?

A woman had a day off from work, a precious open day in which she could do whatever she chose, or nothing at all. When her husband came home from work, there she was with her feet up, reading a magazine. He was happy for her, but she was embarrassed. And so she leapt to her feet, explaining that before this quiet interlude she had done the laundry, made some important phone calls, and helped with their daughter's homework. "Congratulations," he chuckled. "You have earned the air you breathe. Now sit back down."

She was thinking of time as something to be "used". Having "wasted" it, she felt guilty. Happily, her husband's gracious remark let her enjoy the rest of that day. But for

her, as for so many of us, time continues to be a source not only of pressure but also of guilt and judgment.

What does it mean to think of our days and our time as gifts from God? It DOESN'T mean that the only way to use time is to fill it to the brim with non-stop activity. It doesn't mean feeling guilty about every moment that isn't productive.

Here's what I see happening in my own life - I don't know if you can relate or not - but what I do sometimes is stay very busy for a long period of time, working until I'm tired and close to burnout, and then when I have free time, unscheduled time, I tend to waste it because I'm so tired; I just fritter it away instead of spending my free time doing things I really enjoy, things that would replenish my spirit and bring me deep joy. But in times when I balance my life well, I am both more productive at work and better able to enjoy my time off.

Would we live differently if we thought more often about the idea that our days are gifts from God? "Give us this day." "This is the day that the Lord has made." What if you stopped each morning and said, "God, this day is a gift from you. Help me to use it well." How would that change the way you spent your day? Would you be more likely to be intentional about the choices you make? "God, this day is a gift from you. Help me to use it well." Some things we can't change. So you still go to school and work, but perhaps you interact differently with the people you see once you get there. We still have chores to do, bills to pay. But perhaps we see those obligations in a different perspective.

A father tucks his children into bed each night. Their teeth brushed and their hair still damp from the bathtub, he asks them a question, "Where did you meet God today?" And they tell him, one by one: a teacher helped me, there was a homeless person in the park, I saw a tree with lots of flowers in it. He tells his children where he met God, too.

Before the children drop off to sleep, the stuff of this day has become the substance of their prayer.

How would our days be different if we knew we were going to ask ourselves that question every night: "Where did you meet God today?" How different would our awareness be, throughout the day? Would we be less focused on ourselves and more attentive to the world around us?

You've heard this question before. In fact, you may have heard it so many times that it has become trite. "If you had one year left to live, what would you do?" This question has variations, too -- "If you had one month to live, what would you do?"

My husband and I have become annual attendees of the Cleveland International Film Festival which is going on right now. We saw a short film on Thursday, and the Japanese film maker was in attendance. Afterwards, he was asked, "What motivated you to make your film?" Through an interpreter, he said, "Well, there aren't many movies made in my country about death. I thought it was important to make one so that we all have the opportunity to really think about what it means to live, knowing that we will die."

The film begins with a view of the life of a young Japanese man - I'd guess him to be in his mid to late 20's. He's spent his life as a very shy underachiever. He's almost completely lacking in motivation. He still lives at home. He helps in the family business, but very halfheartedly. He spends his free time in his bedroom playing video games. We see the concern on his parents' faces.

Cut to the next scene and he's in a doctor's office, being told that he has one year left to live. While he's absorbing the news, the doctor leaves the room and asks to talk to the young man's parents in the hallway. The doctor says to the parents, "I don't like lying." And the mother says, "It's the only way. We have to shake him up." So we're let in on the secret. The young man is not really dying. But he thinks he is. And it makes

all the difference. He becomes kind to people, he smiles, he works hard, he develops a social life and - for the first time in his life, has a girlfriend who quickly becomes a pregnant wife, because they both think that they don't have much time. He sings a song about his new philosophy of life - "I don't have much time to live, but I'm going to make the most of every moment." That song is recorded, and it goes viral, and he becomes a celebrity around town. Eventually, of course, the truth comes out. But his philosophy doesn't change. Because he once believed he was going to die soon, he has embraced life and it feels good, and there's no turning back.

Even though it's perhaps an overused concept, there was a wonderful spirit of life and joy in this short film.

Remember the song that was popular a few years ago, "Live like you were dying"?

"He said I was in my early 40's,

With a lot of life before me,

And a moment came that stopped me on a dime.

I spent most of the next days, lookin' at the x-rays,

Talkin' 'bout the options and talkin' 'bout sweet time.

Asked him when it sank in, that this might really be the real end.

How's it hit ya, when you get that kind of news.

Man what ya do.

And he says,

I went sky divin',

I went rocky mountain climbin',

I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fumanchu.

And I loved deeper,

And I spoke sweeter,

And I gave forgiveness I've been denying,
And he said someday I hope you get the chance,
To live like you were dyin'.
He said I was finally the husband,
That most the time I wasn't.
And I became a friend a friend would like to have.
And all the sudden goin' fishing,
Wasn't such an imposition.
And I went three times that year I lost my dad.
Well I finally read the good book,
And I took a good long hard look at what I'd do
If I could do it all again.
And then.

Like tomorrow was a gift and you've got eternity
To think about what you do with it,
What could you do with it, what can
I do with with it, what would I do with it.”

None of us like to think about the fact that life is uncertain. None of us like to think about death. But surely as Christian people, two weeks before Easter, we are brave enough to think about it for a moment. What did Jesus do with his three years of ministry? How many lives did he touch? How many stories did he tell? How many

people did he heal? He left an impact that has lasted over 2000 years. He knew that each day was a gift from God.

And when he taught people, he said this: “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

A parent was in my office this week. She said, “I realize that I have a habit of focusing on the future instead of on the present. I like to look forward to things, but sometimes I just need to live today. I noticed this about myself when one of my children started talking about her plans for the future. Planning is good, but she’s so obsessed about the future that she has trouble enjoying the present.”

We can look forward to the future but don’t let the future rob you of the joy that is to be found in the present moment. And worrying about the future does us no good at all. All we have is today - what does God want you to do with it?

A wise person once wrote this, “Our true home is the present moment...the miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green Earth in the present moment.”

Let us live today to the fullest, aware that life is uncertain, and that God has so much for us to do and to enjoy.

(Inspiration for this sermon comes from [Receiving the Day](#) by Dorothy C. Bass.)