

Sermon 15 July 2018 Time

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 Mark 6:30-34

I want to address the very important issue of time, and I want to approach it by talking about both the taking and giving of time.

So firstly, taking time. We should, as always, take a lead from Jesus. Time and time again, we read of Jesus withdrawing from the demands of the people to take some time out. He needed this to recharge the batteries and also, of course, to spend some quality time with God. We hear in our gospel reading Jesus saying to the disciples, 'Let's get away from the crowds for a while and rest.' Now as it happens, this didn't last too long because the crowds tracked them down and it was just a little later that Jesus fed all five thousand of them with the loaves and fishes. But the intent was there.

Mark 1:35 'The next morning Jesus awoke early long before daybreak and went out alone into the wilderness to pray.' Luke 6:12 'One day Jesus went to a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night.' We think if we manage to take half an hour out of our day to spend with God, we are doing well! Taking time out to commune with God was very part of Jesus's life.

There are two aspects here. There is the need to find quality time to pray, and also there is the need just to slow down, to take a breath, to recharge the batteries. Life more and more is geared to the fast lane, literally. You go to McDonald's and you don't even have to get out of your car, just take the drive through lane. And how much time are we saving? Just the time it takes to walk from our car in the carpark and back again. The service time is exactly the same. If there is a queue inside the shop, you can be sure there will be a queue in the car lane. But we all do it. Perhaps we are just getting lazy!

Lazy or not, there is no doubt we are suffering from what is known as 'hurry sickness.' One of the great illusions of our day is that hurrying will buy us more time. How many of us, when checking out at the supermarket, scrutinize the checkout queues in order to ascertain which one will be the quickest? I am so very guilty. And then, having made my choice, I am quite likely to change queues because another queue actually appears a better option. And then you can guarantee that there will be a hold-up in the queue I have finally chosen! Chill, man!

Another situation where we see people suffering from hurry sickness is in the car, and a typical example which always amuses me is when you have two lanes merging. At the Karaka on-ramp is a prime example because you actually have three lanes merging within the space of about 100 metres. Invariably, you will have a driver squeezing past on the inside just to gain another car length. I always think to myself, 'Congratulations, my friend, you have just saved yourself, even at this slow pace, about 4 seconds on your trip.' I mean, is the outcome really worth it?

People suffering from hurry-sickness invariably indulge in multi-tasking, which means attempting to do more than one thing at a time, but that takes too long to say. Some people, invariably women, are better at multi-tasking than others, but the inevitable upshot is that instead of doing one job properly, we end up doing several jobs unsatisfactorily. The car is a favourite place for multi-tasking. Hurry-sick people may drive, talk on the phone, eat, apply make-up, drink coffee and change the radio station all at the same time.

Now here we come to what I believe is a very significant consequence of hurry-sickness. People in a hurry have a diminished capacity to love. Why do I say that? Very simply because love always takes time, and time is one thing hurried people don't have. The giving of time – our second approach to time. The point is this, because time is such a precious commodity, when we give our time to someone we are making a very strong statement about where they feature in our priorities. Love in the Christian context is about caring for someone; it is about affirming them, it is about valuing them. When we give someone our time, we are doing just that.

There is the story of a lawyer who lived 500 miles from her elderly father. They had not seen each in a number of months. The father calls her up and asks, 'When are you going to visit me?' The daughter proceeds to tell him about the demands on her time, her court schedule, meetings and so on. So the father says, 'You must tell me something I've been wondering about. When I die, do you intend to come to my funeral?' She responds, 'Dad! I can't believe you'd ask that. Of course I would come to

your funeral.’ The father replies, ‘Good. Let’s make a deal. Forget the funeral, I need you now more than I will then.’

The most precious thing we can give anyone is time. We are inclined to use materialistic measurements in gauging the extent of one’s giving and that can be important too. But in the end it is no substitute for time. In our busy world it is not easy to give someone our time, but when we do that we are giving a very clear message that we care about them, that they are important to us.

In speaking about servanthood, we explored how reaching out to someone in need is so very important because it naturally gives them a lift. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, we are dispensing help, assistance in some way. And secondly, putting aside what we might actually be doing for them, the very fact that we are taking the time to do this is gives them a lift, contributes towards making them feel valued.

Three weeks ago we spoke about the importance of listening and how affirming that can be for someone. Listening entails the giving of our time, that is really why it is so affirming.

Bottom line is this, if you want to make an impression, if you want to influence, and more importantly, if you want to give someone a lift, give your time.

I want to finish by saying this – it is because it kills love that hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life. Hurry lies behind much of the anger and frustration of modern life. As I said before, people in a hurry have a diminished capacity to love. That’s why Jesus never hurried. If we are to follow Jesus, we must eliminate hurry from our lives – because by definition we can’t move faster than the one we are following.

Reverend Warner Wilder