

Sermon Preached on March 13, 2022 – Second Sunday in Lent

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St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Yarmouth, ME 04096

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

On Jesus' Time

I laughed to myself when reading Jesus' response to the Pharisee's in this morning's text

The Pharisees approach Jesus and warn him that they've heard that Herod, the great Roman ruler of the land, has gotten wind of Jesus' movement, he's not pleased, and is planning to kill him: "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you" they tell him

It's such a direct command, you can sense the urgency in their message

And Jesus' response kind of reminds me of the times as a kid when my mom would come in and say "dinner's ready" and my brothers would be so engrossed in a video game that they'd holler back: "just two more demons to slay before the next level! We'll come when we're done"

"Go and tell that fox for me," Jesus says, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work."

It feels simultaneously sassy, daring, and seriously dangerous

Jesus doesn't drop everything he's doing to flee – he hollers back "Go and tell Herod to wait, I'm not done here."

There are so many aspects of "Empire" that Jesus rejects in his ministry – its cruelty, its devaluing of those on the margins, its overemphasis on money as a means of power – there are so many ways in which the Kin-dom of God that Jesus represents flies in the face of Empire that Herod represented

And I love that in this morning's text, Jesus even rejects the Empire's construction of time

Jesus' behavior is surprising because we would expect a person to respond to an urgent threat of death with a similar sense of urgency by getting out of town, Empire would expect that Jesus would respond to its demand for attention (for that's what Herod is really demanding) would be met by immediate compliance, but Jesus doesn't do that

Rather, Jesus says "I'm going to stay here a few more days and keep doing what I'm doing – my timeline is not your timeline"

Oliver Burkeman is a journalist and author who, for 14 years, wrote a column for The Guardian newspaper called, "This Column Will Change Your Life" in which he strove to investigate routes to mental wellbeing

A common theme in his writing was “time” – how to use time wisely, how to make the most of time, how to use time to your advantage, how to plan your time well, etc. He reviewed planners and apps for your phone that were all designed to help you manage your time to have better mental health

After 14 years of exploring and writing on the topic, in his final post, and now also in a book he’s written called *Four Thousand Weeks – Time Management for Mortals*, Burkeman wrote honestly about what he’d learned which is basically – the more you try to control time, the more you try to control time and the more time you lose to do the things you claim you’re trying to make space for by controlling your time better

In a recent interview with Krista Tippett on her podcast, “On Being,” Burkeman shared that “this effort to achieve mastery, this effort to sort of reach the state of feeling controlling and secure with respect to time, it’s not just that it doesn’t work, it’s that it seems to do the opposite of working. It seems to push the things that matter the most further and further over the horizon.”

Burkeman confesses: “I was, and to a significant extent remain, someone who felt like I needed to get on top of everything, otherwise absolutely terrible things would happen; who felt that if I didn’t get to the end of a day having been productive to a certain level that I never seemed to reach, that I hadn’t quite justified my existence on Earth.”

I can’t relate to this at all, can you?

Burkeman describes it as a “frenetic, hamster wheel mode of, I’m going to work really, really hard and put all the rest of my life on hold, and in a week I’m going to finally have reached the serene paradise of being in touch with and on top of everything.”

What is it in this world that has even turned time against us? What is it that has convinced us that, yet again, there is a scarcity of a thing – in this instance, time – and not an abundance? Who was it who decided that our time has to fit some definition of “productive”?

We even manipulate time in order to reap the benefits of sunshine this morning!

Why did Oliver Burkeman feel compelled to write a column entitled “This Column Will Change Your Life” in which he talked about controlling time and it wasn’t for fourteen more years that he realized that the series should have been about liberating ourselves from that idea?

Burkeman attributes a great deal of it to “capitalism, technology, and human ambition” – I agree, and I attribute this this inclination to Empire, to sin, to brokenness, to our distance from God

I attribute it to the belief that permeates our society that says a human must be successful to have worth, rather than acknowledging the holy truth that God proclaims to us again and again in scripture which is that you have been good since God helped to weave you in your parent’s womb

In our world, time is manipulated to benefit those with the most power: as cogs in a greater production line, power demands that we hurry up, meet deadlines, stay on task, plan efficiently – as seekers of justice, we’re told to be patient, don’t rush people to change, and to wait for the arc of history to turn our cultures towards justice

Which is it? Hurry up? Or Wait?

Tell that fox, we're God's people on God's time

Tell that fox that justice doesn't wait

Tell that fox that I am more than my productivity

Jesus liberates us from all the ills of empire, all the ills of turning us and others into commodities

In *Four Thousand Weeks*, Burkeman describes how he felt when he finally realized he was on a hamster wheel and could get off: "It's the feeling of realizing that you'd been holding yourself all this time to standards you couldn't reasonably be expected to meet. And this realization isn't merely calming, but liberating, because once you're no longer burdened by such an unrealistic definition of a life well spent, you're free to consider the possibility that many more things than you'd previously imagined might qualify as meaningful ways to use your finite time.

"You're freed, too, to consider the possibility that many of the things you're already doing with it are more meaningful than you'd supposed and that until now, you'd subconsciously been devaluing them on the grounds that they weren't 'significant' enough. From this new perspective, it becomes possible to see that preparing nutritious meals for your children might matter as much as anything could ever matter, even if you won't be winning any cooking awards, or that your novel's worth writing if it moves or entertains a handful of your contemporaries, even though you know you're no Tolstoy, or that virtually any career might be a worthwhile way to spend a working life, if it makes things slightly better for those it serves."

That watching the sunrise or the sunset is prayer

That the whole of our lives is our offering to God, not just our Sunday mornings or the times we do community service – but from first breath to last, a lifetime of service

We started this season of Lent reminding ourselves of our dustliness – we are holy dust and to dust we shall return

It's true that time in and of itself is everlasting, it's also true that our time on this earth is finite

It's also true that time is not the second hand on a clock – that's simply a scientific tool for measuring it

Time is the changing seasons, time is laughter and giggles, time is wondering how many snowflakes fell last night, time is recognizing a new wrinkle on our beloved's face and a new tooth in the baby's mouth

Time is the journey to safety for those facing conflict and danger, time is anticipating life affirming medicine and surgery, time is offering a meal and a coat to my neighbor

Time is gift, time is offering, time is life

The Summer Day, by Mary Oliver

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean—

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?