

TIME

As you have probably figured out by now, the message that I am going to share with you today has to do with time. You know, the concept of time is a subject that could be studied and discussed for the “rest of time” I guess that you could say. The pun was intended. When I started to think about time I first went on the internet and that is where I found all of the quotations in the little matching game that you just had. Believe me there were plenty of quotations. And, I also took a look in the good old Webster dictionary to see what kind of definition(s) there were for time and it was pretty astounding! I think I counted like 32 different definitions for time and I also found all kinds of quotations with the definitions such as: “abreast of the times” meaning being current; “against time” meaning trying to finish something quickly; “ahead of time” meaning done before it was due; “behind time” meaning being late; “overtime” meaning when the church service goes over an hour we are into overtime like what happened last Saturday, I will try to do better this week! and a couple to go with the text for today which include “in time” meaning God will deliver it in time even though we may be impatient; and “in good time” meaning of course in God’s good time. Are there any favorite quotations or sayings that you have about time? (take some responses)

So, time can have lots of meanings and, did you know, that physics is always trying to study and measure time. I think in physics now they can break down a second into something like thousands or so units – pretty amazing and the scientists are really good at measuring time. Just think of the break though in our life time with the discovery of quartz and how that can be used to measure time. I think if you look at your watch right now you will see that it is a quartz watch. The old watches with all of the wheels and levers and springs are pretty much long gone.

Have you ever watched the show NOVA on PBS the Public Broadcasting Station? Nova is a program that covers various scientific topics and can be very interesting. I was cruising with the remote one night and came across a program about time on Nova and I decided to watch it. It had to do with the theories of Einstein and his understanding of time and included some of the current understandings of time. Well, all I can tell you is that it didn’t take very long at all and I was totally lost trying to follow the explanations given by the scientists regarding time. So, there is no doubt that time can be a very

intimidating subject and that time can have many meanings depending on how the word is used or understood.

In the gospel lesson today, Jesus gives us some understanding regarding how we should use our time and how we need to understand our relationship with God. First of all we hear about the coming of the Son of Man and that there will be signs to announce his coming. Signs like the sun will be darkened and the moon will not shine, and there will be stars falling from the sky, and then God will appear in the clouds and gather up all of his chosen. So we are hearing here about the end times; the end times that over the centuries there have been people trying to interpret, from what is going around them here on this earth, as to when the end times will actually happen. But Jesus quickly tells us – doesn't he – that there is no way that any of us can actually be certain when the Lord will appear again. Jesus says, "But about that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son (meaning Jesus), only the Father." Only the Father knows. But then Jesus doesn't stop there but goes on to say that even though we don't know the time that we still should, in his words, "Be alert, be wakeful. You do not know when the moment comes." In other words, we need to be ready for His coming – we need to be ready all of the time.

So, we don't know when the end times will come, or when our mortal death will occur, but we need to be alert and ready. Here is the main message, the message that we should receive and consider this day – We have no control over the workings of God – he is going to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it and we cannot control this or predict this. In other words, we have no control. We have been chosen by God – chosen at our baptism – and we are his simply because of his word, his love, his grace – we have no choice and no control. Not something that we as independent thinking Americans always like to hear.

Now while this may sound kind of fatalistic and final I don't think it ends there. I think Jesus is also giving us information on what we do have control on – brothers and sisters in Christ we have control of our daily actions. We have a choice on how we stay alert and I think that that word alert is not a word of inactivity but rather a word of ongoing action. So, how do we stay alert? I am sure there are many ways and I am going to just try and examine a couple of ways – ways that I am familiar with in both my daily secular

life and, hopefully, in my spiritual and faith life. First let me talk about my daily secular life – and I am sure that the examples that I give will also be very familiar in your own life. One of the ways that I try to be prepared is in the event of an emergency. We never know when we will experience a personal emergency or somehow be involved in an emergency. It is well known that how someone responds to an emergency can very much depend on what the person has learned or experienced in the past. Let me give a few examples. The schools have periodic fire drills – if there is an actual fire the students and teachers will know how to quickly exit the building. On a national level in our country, there are plans and drills ready in case there should actually be an emergency on a national level such as an atomic bomb – god forbid that that should happen. Something that most of us here in the UP are very much aware of is what to do if the power goes off. We know that we should have candles and/or flashlights ready, along with some provisions to see us through until the power is restored. I think that most of the country now has the 911 number available – a number that you can call and immediately receive help for any possible kind of emergency. Cars are now installed with onstar which can connect us to immediate assistance. When my father was becoming ill, and still living alone at home, he had the life line unit where all he had to do was push a button and there would be an immediate response to see if he needed help. I could give many more examples and I am sure you are thinking of some as you are listening. We know that it is important to have these emergency drills, procedures and types of assistance available just in case we need it because we don't know the day or time of an emergency and, of course, we hope that an emergency never happens.

I was also thinking of another type of preparation and this one definitely involves time and this preparation is important because we know that it is going to happen. What am I talking about here? Well, one that I have recently experienced is retirement. I have been blessed to have worked in jobs that had retirement plans that I now can use in my retirement years. There were a few times, between jobs, when I could have cashed in my retirement plans and thank goodness I had the good sense and ability to let the retirement plans continue to grow financially for me until I was able to retire. Another example could be saving for college, and that you have saved or earned to help meet the expenses of paying for college for yourself or someone close to you , and having parents and

grandparents or scholarships can certainly be a help here. A close example to this could be making sure to study, attend class, complete assignments and whatever else was required so you would complete your college training, or apprenticeship training so that you would be prepared and eligible for good paying jobs in the 21st century job market. All of the study and training is preparing you, over time, for a vocation. One other example that we are doing right now here at Christ the King Church is putting together a plan for this church. We are calling it “God’s Future Plan for Christ the King Lutheran Church.” Pastor Chris has been working with us on this future plan and I think it is going to bear fruit. And, Pastor Chris has been very clear that we are not in control, and that it is God that is in control, but we have the responsibility as Christians to live out our lives as models of Jesus. We need to attempt to discern and act on what we feel is God’s plan for our lives and for our church. A huge challenge! Look for more information to come forth soon on this Future Plan and see how you can be involved in this important undertaking.

But now I have to return to speak about our spiritual lives, our faith lives. How do we prepare for emergencies in our spiritual lives? How do we prepare for retirement for our spiritual lives? To start this off, I am going to share another phrase with you, probably a familiar one for most of you along with a familiar bible verse. The phrase or saying goes like this: “He who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity, is wise for a moment, but a fool forever.” (repeat one more time) And here is the Bible verse that goes with this – it comes from the 16th chapter of Matthew which says: “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Now, let me be quick to point out that it is important to prepare in your earthly life – it is important to make a living, and prepare for retirement and to prepare for other emergencies that may come along. But, we can’t forget about our eternal life can we? You know, my retirement may disappear tomorrow in this risky economy that we live in. Or, I may not wake up tomorrow morning, as morbid as that may sound. As much as we all want to be in control of our lives and as much as we work to have our lives be the way we want it to be, we really don’t have a 100% guarantee that it will all work out – we just don’t have that level of control. Remember that prayer that is said at bedtime:

Now I lay me down to sleep;
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake;
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Whenever I would think of that prayer I would feel kind of scared and exposed but it really is the truth isn't it? We just don't know the time or the hour. So how do we prepare? I think that we have to do things to keep our faith strong. We know as Christians that we are already saved by the grace of God and not because of anything that we have done. God simply asks that we, who have been chosen, remain strong in our faith, and belief in Him, as our Lord and Savior. In the time that we have, we need to discover for ourselves what it is that helps us to maintain our faith. I will just share with you a few things that help me to maintain my faith. One thing I do is to look for angels – now, don't get me wrong, I am not just sitting around looking for some winged creature to descend. You see, I see angels in the kitchen preparing a funeral meal; I see angels teaching our youngsters in Sunday School; I see angels who transport those in need to medical appointments or to attend a church service; I see angels all around me working for their Lord and Master and that strengthens my faith. I feel my faith strengthened by knowing others who have a strong faith and there are many in this congregation. I feel my faith strengthened when others encourage me through words of praise and just a simple thank you. It means so much. And, I feel my faith strengthened when I see the word reaching out to the younger generation and seeing them grow in their love for His church. I feel my faith strengthened when a young pastor – right out of seminary – moves with his family into our midst to be our Shepherd.

Last week the gospel lesson was a passage from Matthew and part of it went something like this – Jesus said, Whatever you did for the least of these you did for me. So, I can feel my faith strengthened when I do service for others. I have always found that when I reach out to help others that I receive much more back than what I even come close to giving out to others. Service to others is a great faith builder! Finally, of course, prayer and worship are great faith builders and, I know that I should do more of it, especially prayer. Remember the saying from the matching game at the beginning of this message –

God said, "If we don't communicate, you haven't got a prayer." Prayer is a way to we can communicate with God and it certainly have strengthen your faith.

In closing, we know that we are not in control and don't know the day or the time when we leave this earthly life. But, I do know that I am running "out of time" and I don't want to go into "overtime" like last week so let me end with this thought. Do you remember the billboards that were popular over ten years ago that had quotes from God? The quote about "If we don't communicate, you don't have a prayer" was from there. I have one more thought, or quote, from God to leave with you today. Here it is (turn the easel around), "If the flood had come today, would you have missed the boat?" God

Amen