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Believers Pause at the Passing of Time



As the symbol depicts, the lights of God's universe mark the passing of time and the changing of seasons. As the calendar brings 2023 to an end and notes the beginning of 2024, the Church looks back to the blessings of the past and the promises of the future. At the center of time is Christ, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Sermon Hebrews 13:5-8, 14

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

Introduction: There is no word in any human language that describes the complete absence of time. We use the word *timeless* but timeless doesn't mean that there is no time. We might say eternity is timeless; time never ends. But time still passes even in eternity. We might say that certain emotions are timeless; humans have always expressed love and joy and they always will. But time still passes. There is no existence in the universe without time.

You and I live in a world of time. We experience seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years and in our lifetime even centuries and millennia. We live with clocks and watches and calendars and schedules. We observe birthdays and anniversaries and national holidays. We celebrate Christmas and Easter and Pentecost. And time passes. There was last Christmas and there is next Christmas. The crops we planted in spring are harvested in fall. The car that was new in 1975 became an antique in 1995. And time passes for each of us. Once upon a time we wished we were older and then the time came when we wished we were younger. At a certain point in life, we realize that there is more time behind us than ahead of us. At a certain point in time, time stops. Not everywhere or for everyone, but time will stop for me. My death certificate will note the time of my death and no one will place a clock in my coffin. King Solomon wrote: **There is a time for everything...a time to be born and a time to die.**

The last day of the year is a good time to think about time. 2023 becomes 2024, December turns into January, 11:59 p.m. ticks toward midnight. Time flies. On days like today we remember that time for us will come to an end. And so we think about time, we focus on how we spend our time now, and we prepare for the time we will spend then. The author who wrote to the Jewish Christians in Rome—we call what he wrote the Letter to the Hebrews—encourages us to do this in the Second Reading for today: **For here we do not have an enduring city, he wrote, but we are looking for the city that is to come.** He leads us to think about time and about this reality:

We Pass the Time from Now until Then

The Jewish Christians who lived in Rome didn't get treated any better just because they were Jews. Rome was OK with Jews, not so much with Christians. So they were thinking that they might go back to some of their Jewish traditions to keep the Romans off their back. This letter warned them about the danger in that and reminded them that Jesus was vastly superior to any of the old customs and worship practices. The Second Reading for today comes at the end of that letter. This is how these Hebrews needed to live as people who follow Jesus.

The author has a list: Love one another as brothers and sister, show hospitality to strangers, care for Christians in prison, honor marriage. All pretty practical. And this is even more practical: **Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have.** I guess this letter could have been written to Christians in Mequon just as much as Christians in Rome. We've been thinking about money since we were kids: Money in birthday cards, money from an allowance or mowing lawns, money for candy and firecrackers. As we grow older, we think about money as income to support our family or to buy a car or a house. As we age, we focus on money as an investment for retirement. From birth to death, money is always close by. The caution here is to not let money consume us or control us. As we walk through life, we can be content because God is going to give us what we need. The author quotes God's promise: **Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.** He says the same to us today. Jesus once told a story about a man who chased after money; he was always grabbing for more: **Take life, easy, he said. Eat, drink, and be merry.** Jesus ended the story with this: **God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you."** St. Paul reminded Timothy, **We brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it.** The lives we live and the time we pass always anticipate the end of our time. **For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.**

God's presence now and God's promise for then allow us to keep everything, including money, in perspective. We gain money gratefully, we spend it carefully, and we save it confidently. Besides that, we love those we know faithfully, we help those we don't know cheerfully, we care for the troubled willingly, and we honor marriage joyfully. **We say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"** As we pass our time from one day to the next and from one year to the next, we rely on a God who knows our names and supplies our needs. We exercise the faith God gives us by spending our time and living our lives with confidence and contentment. Not because we have to or because we must but because we can and we want to.

This isn't the first money sermon you've heard and it isn't the first money sermon I've preached. Fact is the Bible has all sorts of things to say about money. St. Paul reminded Timothy that **The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.** Of course there are all sorts of roots for evil and all sorts of people become entangled in those roots. We have, too. So the letter moves on to another piece of advice. We pass our time from now until then with a God who provides for us, a faith that empowers us, and leaders who preach to us. **Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.** So who are these leaders? The Jewish Christians in Rome might have thought of Paul and Peter or the two dozen heroes of faith the letter lists in chapter 11 or the great cloud of witnesses the author mentions in chapter 12. We might think of Martin Luther or the great Lutheran hymn writers like Paul Gerhardt. We certainly think of Bible-loving parents or the pastors who confirmed us or who served our congregation in the past. But what's important here isn't names or faces or titles. What's important is that they spoke the word of God to us.

They all had their faults; they were all sinners like we are. Some were friendly and some seemed aloof. Some were too critical and some too easy-going. Some were full of energy and some not so much. Some kept us awake in the pulpit and some put us to sleep. But the leaders we remember best and respect the most are the ones who spoke the Word of God to us. They weren't afraid to make us squirm when they talked about sin. They

didn't always pound the pulpit but they often hammered our hearts with the realities of Satan and death and hell. Those same leaders also know when to say Amen and when not to say Amen. They never ended a sermon without showing us Jesus. They took us to Jesus at Christmas and spoke about the Son of God who became a man for us. They took us to Jesus on Good Friday and spoke about the sacrifice he offered to give us peace with God. They took us to Jesus on Easter and spoke about his victory over death. The leaders we remember best are the ones who walked with Jesus and talked with Jesus and shared with us what Jesus said. Their memory reminds us of the pattern we want to follow. And so we pass the time from now until then by hearing and learning and trusting the Word of God and the good news about Jesus.

I was 23 days old when 1949 moved to 1950. Harry Truman was president and there were only 48 states. A lot of time has passed from then until now. But in all that time Jesus has always been here—always here to forgive, always to provide, always to guide, always to comfort, always to answer, always to promise, always to carry us home. Whether we're seven or 70, only Jesus knows how much time will pass from now until then. But whatever our time, Jesus will be there, for he **is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the one who is and who was, and who is to come.** And our times are in his hand. Amen.

This sermon was preached by Pastor James Tiefel.