

“Out of Time”
Psalm 90:1-8 and 12
First Presbyterian Church, Sarasota
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Rev. Glen Bell

So often, we live as if we are out of time. Simply out of time.

A recent National Public Radio program shared that “across professions, half of Americans surveyed say they are exhausted from work. More and more of us feel scrambled, tired and drained.” One guest on the program described her life and the life of her spouse and their two children this way. “We were scheduled to the gills. Our devices were pinging with leftover work emails. Homework. Shuttling the kids between scheduled activities, social events, play dates. There was a kind of sameness, this crush of life and work. I was tired and snappy. I was never off. I was always on. We were all on, the whole family. I felt like a failure. We were just in a grind. On Sunday nights, our son would say, ‘Was that a weekend?’”

One of the biggest changes in modern American life is the ever-present smartphone. There is no longer any down time. At any moment our work or other commitments can reach across the digital divide with a request, a question or another task to accomplish.

One researcher reported that 75% of the American workforce is disengaged at work, partially because the speed of life feels like it is exponentially increasing. We receive more information than ever. One study revealed we each are receiving 30,000 gigabytes of information each day, enough to crash a small computer in a week. And that study came out the year before the release of the first iPhone.

Pastors are not immune. I find myself responding to texts and emails in every spare moment, even at a stoplight. Last Thursday, while at our quarterly presbytery meeting, I wrote encouraging notes to six members of our church.

And get this: My retired friends tell me that often they feel more scheduled, more jammed up than ever.

What are we to do? Who are we to become?

In the face of these pressures, you and I are invited to a radically countercultural practice: Living out of time.

Living out of time . . . that is, living beyond the demands of time, even beyond the realm of time. Listen again to the first verse of Psalm 90. “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.”

God invites us to breathe, to enjoy the beauty around us, a sunrise, the smile and laughter of a child, the aroma of fresh bread in the kitchen. God invites us to discover and rest in the promise that God’s love and mercy is our dwelling place. At the beginning of our lives, God is our dwelling place. Right now, in this moment, God is our dwelling place. At the end, God will be our dwelling place.

We need not fear. We need not give ourselves over to the demands of our schedule as a measure of our person or worth. We can live out of time, beyond time.

I try to do some of this every day in the early morning. It is a part of my spiritual Sabbath practice. A pastor’s schedule is often busy in the morning, afternoon and evening. So early mornings often find me walking or exercising or listening to music. This often leads me to praying for others, not in a listed, scheduled way, recalling the names of every person on our weekly pastoral care list, but as you come to mind or heart.

Early morning may not be the right time for you. Perhaps it is at lunch. Maybe it is in the evening. Or maybe it’s at the end of the day. Ignatian spirituality, from the Roman Catholic tradition, invites each of us to look back and reflect on our daily experience, to step out of time and think of what we’ve

encountered during the day. “Where did you experience God today?” we ask ourselves or our spouse or children. “And where did it feel as if God was absent?” “Where did you experience love and joy?” “And where did it seem to be absent?”

Find a rhythm that works for you, a time or an exercise routine or a place or a prayer practice that leads you into Sabbath.

Living out of time, beyond its press and demands, is not only important in our individual spiritual lives, but also in our life together as a congregation. Living this way teaches us the deep meaning of our days. Living this way guides us into the future and help us to mature and grow into wisdom. Recently my friend Sue Krummel, a Presbyterian minister and former pastor of Great Rivers Presbytery, wrote this reflection on the parable of the bridesmaids from Matthew 25.

“How many of us show up to the do the church work we have always done by preparing in the way we have always prepared? How many of us expect next week and next month and next year to be exactly like the last thirty years and make no changes to our program? How many of us do not want to imagine that we need to change?

“What have we planned in our preparation for Advent and Christmas that is different than anything we have done before? How are we prepared to adjust to the reality of our neighborhood or the strangers who may join us because it is Christmas? Have we realized that God is always calling us to walk forward into a future whose details we cannot predict?”

We cannot change the past. We cannot clearly see the future. And sometimes we cannot even manage the anxiety of this moment. But we can trust the One who is our dwelling place.

That trust makes all the difference. We can trust that God will heal our wounds from the past – and forgive the ways we have wounded others. We can trust that God will prepare us to greet an unknown future. And we can trust that God can free us to rest in this present moment.

This invitation to live beyond time, beyond its demands, is not only at the heart of our spiritual practices and not only the way we walk into the future, but it also promises to change some of our worst moments.

This is the hardest challenge, I think, when the day has gone all wrong, when the conversation has been strained or difficult, when our plans go awry, when our flight has been delayed. Even right then, we can dwell in God’s love. We can discover the God who is our heart, our healer, our home.

Listen to this poem by Naomi Shihab Nye, entitled “Gate A-4.”

“Wandering around the Albuquerque airport terminal, after learning my flight had been delayed for four hours, I heard an announcement, ‘If anyone in the vicinity of gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come of the gate immediately.’ Gate A-4 was my gate. I went there.

“An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled on the floor, wailing. ‘Help,’ said the flight agent. ‘Talk to her. What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this.’

“I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke to her in Arabic . . . The minute she heard any words she knew . . . she stopped crying. she thought the flight had been cancelled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, ‘No, we’re fine, you’ll get there, just later. Who is picking you up? Let’s call him.’

“We called her son, I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with her mother till we got on the plane and then ride next to her. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad, and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out, of course, they had ten shared friends. Then I thought – just for the heck of it – why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her? This all took up two hours.

“She was laughing a lot by then, telling of her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade *mamool* cookies, little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts, from her bag and was offering them to all the women at the gate. To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from

California, the lovely woman from Laredo, we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling

“And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought, ‘This is the world I want to live in, the shared world.’ Not a single person in that gate, once the crying of confusion stopped, seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women.

“This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.”

Sisters and brothers, this can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost, even in the hustle and bustle of our days, the speed of life, the crush of emails and texts and things to do.

This can still happen anywhere, anywhere we free ourselves from time, anywhere we remember that out of sight, out of earshot, out of time, we remember that God is our dwelling place, then and now and forever.

It is like a sacrament when we discover that God’s goodness, God’s love is more than a thousand years, more than yesterday, more than a prediction. It is the bedrock right now, the foundation of our lives, the mercy of the ever-present, transforming every moment, each and every moment.

So live as if you are out of time, beyond its grasp, unmeasured by its demands. Live out of love and joy and peace, of patience and kindness and generosity, of faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. Live in trust.

For this can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.