

The Time on Our Hands

Time after Pentecost
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Genesis 15:1-6; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The squirrels in Camp Hill are notorious for chewing electric power lines—so much so that PP&L recently had to replace some lines near our home. One result of the squirrels' vandalism was that our power service frequently would shut down for a few seconds and then come back on. Not a huge problem, except that we have all those LCD clocks to reset. Now, I've noticed that the clocks in our house have one of two ways of handling a momentary cut in power. For instance, the clock radio on my nightstand just blinks "12:00" over and over until I set a new time. The clock radio on my husband's nightstand, however, starts at "12:00" but then steadily advances minute by minute: "12:01, 12:02" and so on. I don't know the reason for that difference. I just know it's annoying to go around the house resetting clocks.

Those blinking displays represent the issues surrounding time in our lessons today. The ways we experience time are like those clocks around our house. Some days we experience time as if it just stops. Time stands still, or at the very least, moves in excruciatingly slow motion. Aren't there moments when we seem to be waiting interminably for time to pass, particularly as we wait for something big, as we anticipate something in our future? 12:00, 12:00, 12:00 . . . We become impatient or bored or frustrated, maybe even supposing that future will never arrive.

On the other hand, there are those days when time passes, and it takes us by surprise. We wonder just where the time has gone. When did it become August 12th? What happened to the summer? There is still so much we want to do. But time marches on, and we are carried along with it, whether we are ready or not.

Jen and Matt—when you waited those nine months for Lily's safe arrival, I suppose some days time did drag. All that anticipation. Sure, there were things to do to prepare for Lily's birth, but didn't time crawl by on occasion, particularly those last few months, Jen, when it was so hard to find a comfortable position in which to sleep? The hours—and your body—hung heavy.

And then, labor began, and there was no turning back the hands of time. Suddenly things were moving along. You were swept up in the passing of time, and you knew you had to be ready, even if you wondered deep inside whether you were **really** ready to be parents.

Maybe you can understand what Abraham and Sarah were going through in our lesson from Genesis. Their waiting for a child is even more prolonged than yours. They've not even conceived yet! They only have the **promise** of a conception, and the **promise** of a birth of a son, and the **promise** of descendants as many as the stars in the sky. Time hangs heavy, but Sarah's body does not yet hang heavy. Time seems to stand still, and it looks to them as if there will never be a child of their own, that the promises God made will go unfulfilled, or at least fulfilled

in ways less desirable—a slave’s child will be Abraham’s heir. It’s 12:00, 12:00, 12:00. No change in their situation for the foreseeable future.

They are not only impatient and frustrated, they are despairing. And the Lord God’s response? God reiterates the promise, saying the slave’s child will not be their heir. They will bear their own child. But there’s still no sense of time moving forward here. Time still hangs heavy for them. They receive the Lord God’s promise . . . but that’s all.

Reading the book of Genesis, chapter by chapter, we wait along with Abraham and Sarah. Time moves in excruciatingly slow motion. Their son Isaac won’t be born until chapter 21, then there’s the distinct possibility Isaac won’t survive into adulthood, and meanwhile, Abraham and Sarah are on this journey of faith, trusting in God’s promises alone.

That’s why the writer of Hebrews, a book near the tail end of the New Testament, lifts up Abraham and Sarah as such models of faith for Christians like you and me. We read that in our second lesson today. Abraham and Sarah walked into their future in faith, with nothing but God’s promises to sustain them. By faith they obeyed God’s call to journey to a new land. By faith they remained in that place they’d been sent to. By faith they waited, until God’s promise of a child was fulfilled. And then, says the writer of Hebrews, Abraham and Sarah died in faith. Do you notice that some of the promises of God went unfulfilled in their earthly lifetime? They really didn’t experience the Promised Land—it would be generations to come who would experience the gift of new land and of the nation Israel. The author of Hebrews wrote, “*(They) died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them.*” Yes, time passed, sometimes slowly, sometimes surprisingly quickly. But the years did indeed go by, and Abraham and Sarah eventually went to their graves, some promises unfulfilled. For those of us who always want what we want when we want it, for those of us who cannot fathom the concept of fulfillment deferred but demand immediate gratification, those are hard words to hear and read. Yet, the writer again lifts up Abraham and Sarah as models for us who are on our journeys of faith: “*Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.*” Hebrews’ author proclaims there **will** be a future fulfillment for those who trust in and wait upon God, even for those people who lived centuries before the coming of Jesus Christ, and even for you and me. God’s time somehow encompasses all our times, holding us and our stories and our hopes and our dreams, holding all of this together in God’s own great vision and plan—and the plan is that God has prepared a final and glorious kingdom for us all.

So you and I, in this life, must wait. We walk in faith, and not by sight. You know, Jen and Matt, sometimes parenting is like that. We can read every child development book there is, check constantly with other parents, ask our own parents’ advice and then, most of the time, we end up having to parent our own children with faith that God, in his wisdom and love, will be our guide. We take a leap of faith every time we even attempt to nurture and teach and help our children grow. For we really don’t know where the journey will take us, or our children, some days.

One of your first acts of faith is bringing Lily to be baptized. By faith, you trust that in this holy act, this sacrament, some of God’s promises to Lily are being fulfilled right now. This day,

having been baptized into the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, Lily is named a beloved child of God. This day Lily is joined to us in this fellowship of faith as our sister in Christ. This day Lily is assured forgiveness of her sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. And then there's this other promise—she will inherit eternal life. That's the promise of the kingdom, given once more. Only she's going to have to wait on that one. So, how is she to live, fulfillment deferred here? How are any of us to live, fulfillment deferred?

Well, Jesus **gives** us a way to live. He gives us a way to live in this life, where time is never really in our control; where, on the one hand, time seems to stand still and on the other hand, seems to rocket us forward, carrying us pell-mell into the unknown. In today's Gospel lesson Jesus gives us a way to live, first, by quelling our fears and then reiterating the promise—He says we are not to be afraid. We are God's precious people, and it is the deepest pleasure of God to give us life in his kingdom. Jesus is calling you and me to faith here, isn't he? Second, Jesus gives us a way to live until that promise of the kingdom is fulfilled by encouraging us to be **ready** as we wait. Even if it's 12:00, 12:00, 12:00, we are to be attentive and prepared. The image he gives is of servants waiting for their master to return. Waiting so they can open the door for him when he comes—whenever that might be. The servants are to be dressed and ready. We ask, ready for what? Jesus implies ready for service. **That's** what we do as we wait. We are to be ever ready to serve. So, says Jesus, stop treasuring your possessions, stop grasping those possessions so tightly, stop considering them your all-in-all. Instead, give generously to those in need. Jen and Matt, that's what you'll be teaching Lily in these years to come—to serve lovingly in the world in Christ's name. That's being ready. That's time well spent. **AMEN.**