

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany
January 29, 2012
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

“What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.”
(NIV)

I don't know if it is just me, but it seems that the older that I get the faster time goes. Do you feel the same? Perhaps you wonder how it feels that almost overnight the price for a gallon of gas went from around a quarter to nearly four dollars. The days, the months, even the years, appear to go by in a flash. Before you know it the baby you held in your arms is carrying their lunchbox to kindergarten. All too soon the girl whose hand you held on the way to kindergarten you now hold as you walk her down the aisle. You watch as your children start to have children and even their children have children. While it might have seemed like yesterday that your parents were taking care of you, today you find yourself taking care of them, and the tomorrow quickly arrives where we need others to take care of us.

In fact, God's Word tells us the same thing. Moses writes in Psalm 90: ***“The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow for they quickly pass, and we fly away.”*** Even if we live to 100 our time on earth does not seem all that long because it isn't. In our lesson for today Paul also makes this clear: ***“What I mean brothers, is that the time is short.”*** We might even translate this to mean opportune time. Our days are limited, our time is short, and we only have so many opportunities. So this morning as we take a look at this portion of God's Word I would like us to consider this question: **How are we to spend our time?**

Two very important principles of interpreting Scripture are the key to understanding the verses before us. We must always look carefully at the immediate context. We also are to view every verse in the entire context of the Bible; in other words we let Scripture interpret Scripture knowing that the Bible will never contradict itself. If I don't follow these principles and just let these words stand alone I might have some wives, including my own, who would not be very happy with me when we read: ***“From now on those who have wives should live as if they have none.”*** What is the Lord telling us in this verse? Is marriage a waste of our time? Are we supposed to ignore our wives and do what we want because, after all, life is too short to worry about them? Not at all! In this section Paul had even written how marriage is a good thing. God established it for us and Paul gives some instructions on fulfilling our marriage promises. So too the rest of Scripture holds marriage in high regard and the Lord tells us: ***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”*** (Ephesians 5).

So since Paul is not giving us the freedom to neglect our wives or to live like our wives don't exist, what does Paul mean then? He is reminding us of a closer relationship, full of greater love, & of more importance than even that of the intimate relationship of husband & wife. While marriage needs and deserves our time, so too does this relationship - even above all

others. Paul could add this truth to all our relationships, whether they are mother/daughter or uncle/nephew or boyfriend/girlfriend. We don't want any of our earthly relationships to cause us to lose sight of our most important relationship. Jesus reminds us of that also when He says: ***“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10).*** So yes, we who have spouses are to spend our time loving them and fulfilling our responsibilities, but we are to remember time is short and there is another relationship for which we are to take time.

Next Paul addresses the emotions that often flood our lives. He writes: ***“those who mourn (are from now on to live), as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not.”*** Again please understand what Paul is saying. He does not forbid us to mourn in times of sadness. Neither does he ask that we remove ourselves from the things in life that make us happy. On the contrary, Paul writes in Philippians, we are able to rejoice in the Lord always. What Paul is saying is that we are not to let the highs and lows of life allow us to lose our perspective? God doesn't want us to get too caught up on riding the roller coaster of emotions. While we will take time expressing our emotions, crying and laughing, there is something of far more value to put our trust in.

Paul continues ***“those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep, and those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them.”*** Again the Lord is not forbidding us to buy any earthly possessions for all these too come from Him. The Lord is not telling us we should not use the things of the world – the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. What God is warning us about is getting caught up in materialism. He doesn't want us to spend all our time chasing after the wind, the things and pleasures of this life, and take our eyes off true treasures. Don't get so caught up in the temporary so that all our attention is taken away from things that are eternal! ***“For this world in its present form is passing away.”*** If we spend all our time going after money and possessions and things of this world we will be left with nothing! So there is another way to spend our time.

Do you see why these words are so fitting for Americans today? We have time, it is just that we have so many things we want to do with our limited time. Every day is a set of decisions. How will I use my time? As we look at our lives and the opportunities we have been given, what has been our focus and priority? Do we want to take time for our earthly relationships? Yes. Will emotions be a part of our life? Yes. Do we take time to earn money, buy things and use them? Yes.

Are we willing to give all these things up to follow Jesus? This is at the heart of the question today about how we are to spend our time. And sadly the answer to that question hasn't always been yes. We have on occasion placed other people ahead of our Savior. We have too often let our emotions carry the day instead of God's promises. We have at times chased money and possessions as if they were the most important things of all.

For such sins may we ask our gracious God to once again forgive us for Jesus' sake. For Jesus made us the most important relationship of all. Jesus set emotion aside and trusted in God even when things looked most bleak. Jesus was rich but for us He became poor so that we through His poverty might become rich. Jesus took our sin upon Himself, even our sins against His very first commandment, and Jesus paid for those sins with His blood. Jesus won for us eternal life by His resurrection from the dead. Now Jesus calls us again today. He says: “follow

me.” He tells us to be ready to leave it all because what Jesus has in store for us is way better than anything this world has to offer.

So how are we to spend our time? How can we not spend it getting to know Jesus even better through His Word? Why would we not spend it worshipping our God? What better use of time could there be than coming up to the Lord’s Table where He forgives our sins and strengthens our faith? Why would we not spend time telling other the good news? And how can we not strive to spend every minute, use every opportunity, and take every breath we have here doing all things to the glory of God?

As I’m sure most of you heard this last week our Lord called our sister in the faith Sandy Brake home to heaven. In her last days here on earth at hospice she had something that never left her, in fact even during her final breaths I saw her holding this in her hand. It was not an ipod, it was not a \$1000 bill, sorry Bryan but it was not even a picture of her sons. What she held in her hand was a cross. What an awesome reminder of what in the end truly matters most of all. **Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to the cross I cling.** For the only thing we can take with us forever is Jesus and what He has done. Jesus, now He is always worth spending time on! Amen.

