

## **“A Timely Message”**

Date: January 24, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Genesis 1:1-5; Luke 19:1-10

Occasion: Stewardship series

Themes: Stewardship, Time

During the month of January I've been preaching a series of sermons about stewardship. So far we've talked about the stewardship of talents and the stewardship of money. Today we want to think about the stewardship of time.

In the first lesson today from the book of Genesis, we learn that on the first day God created light and darkness and called them Day and Night. There you have it. On the first day, God created what would become primary markers of time – day and night.

God knew that the passing of time would be important to humans. On some occasions, time seems to fly; at other times, it seems to crawl. I guess it depends on what your circumstances are. Consider this poem, called “Realize.”

“To realize the value of ten years: ask a newly divorced couple.  
To realize the value of four years, ask a graduate. To realize the value of one year, ask the student who has failed a final exam.

To realize the value of nine months, ask a mother who has given birth to a stillborn. To realize the value of one month, ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby.

To realize the value of one week, ask an editor of a weekly magazine. To realize the value of an hour, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet. To realize the value of one minute, ask a person who has missed the train or bus or plane.

To realize the value of one second, ask a person who has survived an accident. To realize the value of one milli-second, ask a person who has won a silver medal in the Olympics. Time waits for no one. Treasure every moment you have.”

Time is a gift filled with choices, and *that* is at the center of what we are calling *the stewardship of time*. We have choices about how we will use this precious gift, whether we will use it wisely or whether we will squander it. Another illustration, a story I’ve used at funerals called “The Magic Bank.” Maybe I’ve shared it with you before?

Imagine you have just won the following prize in a contest. Each morning, your bank account will deposit \$86,400 into your private account for you to use. However, this prize has rules, just as any game has rules.

The first set of rules, are these: 1. Everything you don’t spend during each day will be taken away from you. 2. You and you alone, may spend it. You may not transfer any of the money into some other account. Each morning, upon awakening, the bank opens your account with another \$86,400 for that day.

Now, the second set of rules: The bank can end the game, without warning, at any time. When it decides, the bank can say, “Its over; game over.” Then the bank will close the account and you will not receive a new one.

What would you do with your winning? You would buy anything and everything you wanted, right? Not only for yourself, but for all of the people you love, right? Even for people you don’t know, because you couldn’t possibly spend it all on yourself. You would try to spend every cent, and use it all. Right?

Well, actually, this game is reality. Each of us is in possession of such a magical bank. We just don't see it. The truth is the magical bank is time. Each morning we awaken, God gives us 86,400 *seconds* as a gift of life. And when we go to sleep at night, any time remaining is not credited to us.

What we haven't lived-up that day, is lost forever. Yesterday is forever gone. Each morning the account is refilled, but the bank can dissolve your account, at any time, without warning! So, what will you do with your 86,400 seconds?

Remember this - Life is a gift from God. Enjoy every second of your life, because time races by so much quicker than you can imagine. Life is precious; may we treasure it and use our time wisely.

Stewardship is simply the way in which we care for the things which God has entrusted to us. A good steward is a responsible manager, a good caretaker, a loving guardian. We are to be good stewards of the talents God has given us. We are to be good stewards of the money we possess.

We are also called to be good stewards of the time entrusted to us. You see, stewardship involves a whole lot more than just money. It's really about the way in which we live our lives; which is why I chose this passage from Luke as the Gospel lesson this morning.

Zacchaeus was transformed by his meeting with Jesus. Zacchaeus had a change of heart. Zacchaeus was changed because he had met the living Christ, the Son of God. And while it's true that this passage talks about what he did in terms of his money, what's more important is the decision that Zacchaeus made about the priorities in his life.

Before meeting Jesus, he had been a dishonest tax collector, who robbed people of their money. Afterwards, Zacchaeus repaid four-fold the amount of money he had taken from others. That decision was a signal to the world that he was a changed man.

God and the Lord Jesus Christ were now his highest priorities. Not money, but the Lord. When God and Jesus are Lord in our lives, our priorities change. Even our time comes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

So, we need to be asking, are we using time in a way that honors him? Are we using our time in ways that are meaningful and purposeful, or do we waste time? Now, I understand we all need a little down time to relax. But do we need to spend hours and hours on Facebook or in front of the television?

Quite often I hear people say, "I'm sorry, I can't do that. I just don't have time." Maybe that's true. And maybe we're just not using our time very wisely. I spend time on Facebook and I watch television, too. But I need to be careful I don't allow those things to eat up my time, for other things where my time would be better spent.

We have choices. Let's be mindful of the wonderful gift of time that has been given to us. Because we never know when the bank will close, and we won't have another 86,400 seconds given to us. Time is a gift, and we can spend it all on ourselves, or we can share the gift with someone else. The gift of your time is priceless.

A closing story, called *The Night Watch*. A nurse took the tired, anxious serviceman to the bedside. "Your son is here," she said to the old man. She had to repeat the words several times before the patient's eyes opened.

Heavily sedated because of the pain of his heart attack, the old man saw the young uniformed Marine standing beside his bed. He reached out his hand. The Marine wrapped his toughened fingers around the old man's limp ones, squeezing a message of love and encouragement.

The nurse brought a chair so the Marine could sit beside the bed. All through the night the young Marine sat there in the poorly lighted ward, holding the old man's hand and offering him words of love and strength. Occasionally, the nurse suggested that the Marine move away and rest awhile.

He refused. Whenever the nurse came into the ward, the Marine was oblivious to her, and to all of the night noises in the hospital: the bells going off down the hall, the laughter of the night staff in the hallway, the cries and moans of the other patients.

Now and then she heard him say a few gentle words. The dying man said nothing, only held tightly to his son all through the night. Along towards dawn, the old man died. The Marine released the now lifeless hand he had been holding and went to tell the nurse.

While she performed her duties, he waited. Finally she came out into the hall to speak to him. She started to offer him words of sympathy, but the Marine interrupted her. "Who was that man?" he asked.

The nurse was startled, "He was your father," she answered him. "No, he wasn't," the Marine replied. "I never met him before in my life." "Then why didn't you say something when I took you in to see him?"

“I knew right away there had been a mistake, but I also knew he needed his son, and his son wasn’t here. When I realized he was too sick to tell whether or not I was his son, knowing how much he needed me, I stayed.”

The moral of the story: when someone needs you, just be there. Stay. Take the time. Time is a gift from God, a gift that we get to choose how we use. May we be good stewards, according to Kingdom values, the Kingdom of God. Amen? Amen!