

Pastor T.C. Arnold
New Year's Eve
Psalm 90
December 31st, 2017

On a night when we talk about “time” the Psalm that is appointed for this evening is quite appropriate. Psalm 90 is the oldest Psalm in the Psalter. How do we know? We know because it was written by Moses. Most every other Psalm was written David or one of his contemporaries. And, on a night when we talk about time, an “old” year like 2017, we can look at “time” now past and see the joys and the struggles... just like Moses... in this very penitential Psalm.

The fourth verse, the one that is in a different font style in your bulletin this evening says, *“For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.”* This verse gives us a look at the way God sees life. The assumption that living a long life, like, say, Methuselah, is a sure sign of blessing and cannot be the object of God’s wrath is a fallacious one. Truth be told, no one can escape the wrath of God. Luther says that God’s wrath is not just wrath but rather God’s speedily executed wrath. What Luther means is that it will come quickly upon us. Even if Methuselah did live a thousand years, from a Gospel perspective, his life is short, for a thousand years are like a passing yesterday.

On a night when we talk about time, perhaps it is time to understand something about time. Time understood by us is inapplicable to God. Life is a good creation of God. Because life passes away quickly and fearfully, we rightfully deplore our terrible condition. We die too fast and cannot take comfort in the thought that we can defer and mitigate death. It seems to follow us everywhere and at times we think of it as our nearest neighbor. If our own thoughts are not occupied by it for us, then they are for another... one we know... one we love.

But then again, we do need to fear death. It keeps us in mind that our time here is short and that we live for the Lord and Him only. That is not a bad thing, beloved in the Lord. Being insensitive to the terror of death, we go about our tasks as if we are going to live forever and this is not a good thing. To fear death brings to light the need for us to be in God’s good graces. For apart from that grace there is no life... there is only death... eternal death.

You see, the time of life is all a matter of perspective. For us 70 or 80 years or longer would be a good and long life. From God’s perspective, a life lived that long is like a sound of a speech that vanishes as nothingness; from a human perspective, life, even an extended one, is like a flight in which there is nothing but toil and trouble. That is what verse 10 of the Psalm says to us... that those days are *“but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.”* So Moses pleads to God, *“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”*

So here is the factor of time that lays upon our heart. We want life to be long and filled with joy. Those are two things that all of us will revel in on an evening like this one when we reflect of the gift of time given by God. But Psalm 90 reminds us of two things... First, our time may not always be joyous. We hear that pretty clear from the Psalm as Moses cries out to God in despair. We know this from our own experiences as well. Second, our time may not be long. And, while these two might be the most important to you, they seem not to be so important to God, which is a bit disappointing.

Time matters so much more to you than it does for God. So, while we are left to ask, “how long, oh Lord?” The Lord asks instead, “How?” Just how and not how long. How will you spend your 2018? How will you use what God has given to you... all that you have... to be a good steward for the sake of the kingdom? How will you share Jesus to your neighbor and your family this year? The truth is we are consumed with the “how long” and the measure of joy that makes for a pleasurable life, while God is asking you the more important question of simply, “how?”

Don’t measure life through the leans of joy or satisfaction. For when we do that, a lack of contentment is quite probable because there is always someone out there that we envy because of all the perceived joy and excitement they live. God has given this life that you have to live now. To compare may bring despair. So don’t. God has given you the blessings of your life... not someone else’s life.

Don’t measure life by length either. We know people who have been taken by our Lord into heaven way sooner than what we perceive they should. God’s impact through them cannot be quantified by our human brains. While we are always left in wonderment on why some of the greatest people we know, the people that we love most are taken from us way too early, God works through His chosen in ways we cannot understand. We cannot quantify value through a long life.

Here’s proof of that... at the age of about 32 or 33 a man born in Bethlehem, born in the most miraculous way, was put to death... at just the right time. Not one of us would ever argue with God’s timing with Jesus... even though, I’m sure, there were many who watched Jesus die that day and thought, “he died so young.” We stand on the other side of understanding and know fully and completely that Jesus came to die at just the right time. And with this, let it be known to you, that God, for you, is so much more concerned with the “how” of your life more than the “how long.” God is even more concerned with making sure you know the joys of a life everlasting than the pleasures of a life lived today. For in the joy of life everlasting, there is no comparison with those we think live such a better life now. In Him, for you, all things are made perfect. This is good news!!

Jesus comes today, and in your new year, at just the right time... His time. We like to measure, He likes to give. We like compare, He provides beyond comparison. We want joy our way, He gives us eternal joy that last much more than the years of our life. Rejoice in what God will do for you in this new year. I promise, you will be blessed. How do I know? Because it is God’s promise this His faithful people. His blessings will know no bounds. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.