

TIME

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
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I have on the communion table some devices that supposedly track the progression of time. I have a travel alarm clock that glows in the dark. I have an alarm clock that you have to wind up...it is called Baby Ben. It also glows in the dark. I have watches that I wear on my left wrist and some of Graham's selection of pocket watches. And on my left wrist I have my Fitbit. I also have a simple time piece called an hourglass containing what is known as the sands of time. It is a decorative one, so it only runs for about 15 minutes instead of hours, but it works...watch the sand slip through time...

The most famous timepiece I can think of is Big Ben in merry old England. There are Sundial clocks that I have seen in Mexico that are ancient. The oldest ones known to us are shadow clocks and date back to 1500 BC in ancient Egyptian and Babylonian astronomy. One of the tallest buildings in the world is the skyscraper Taipei 101 which opened in 2004 whereby an adjoining park uses the tower which stands over ½ kilometer in height for a huge horizontal sundial. The oldest working clock in the world is in the Salisbury Cathedral dating back to 1386 located in England. Its main purpose was to strike a bell at precise times such as twelve times at noon.

So, people have tracked the passing of time on a daily basis with a 24-hour clock of some type for centuries. However, for some reason we cannot feel the exact passing of time unless we track it and watch the hands on the clock or the sound of tick tock, tick tock. But most of us know when we are hungry and when we are tired but that does not mean it is time to eat or time to sleep.

I am pretty sure that most of us here have a timepiece on them. Hands up, please. And many of us have clocks at home in almost every room like me. At work I have to track my time on a daily timesheet, and I cannot tell you how many times I am short hours at the end of the day even though I try to keep track of every minute.

Where does the time go? The atomic clock which I will talk about later is supposed to keep the most accurate time. My computer at work matches this time but I have many timepieces that just do not tick tock at the same pace. So, I am always adjusting my numerous timepieces. I like to have them in sync.

The atomic clock truly fascinates me. It was built by the National Institute of Standards and Technology or known as NIST. The NIST-F2 is the second atomic clock to be built and is accurate to one second in 300 million years. It took a decade to develop. You might ask why is this important.

Precise timekeeping underpins much of our modern world. GPS, for instance, needs accuracy of about a billionth of a second in order to keep us from getting lost. The satellites above us rely on high precision coming from the atomic clocks at the US Naval Observation for synchronizing digital networks such as cell phones and the NTP servers that provide the backbone of the internet. How it works is fascinating and uses the cesium atom to track time, but this is out of the scope of my sermon.

However, there is a large international push to find better timekeeping to open up new technology that we at present cannot even dream about. It makes my meagre effort to balance my daily time sheet at work so insignificant.

But as marvelous as this gift of an atomic clock is, I remember that my father knew without looking when it was time for breakfast, when it was time for lunch and when it was time for dinner...8 a.m., 12 p.m. and 5 p.m. on the dot. His clock was his hunger pains. My cats go and sit on the living room stairs a few minutes before I am to arrive home from work. My daughter's dogs know the precise minute they should be fed and stare at you until they are fed. Animals seem to know how to track time better than we do.

My Oxford dictionary describes time as "the indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present and future regarded as a whole." So, it has no beginning and no ending. Batteries may run out in our timepieces but time marches on. To some degree we can manipulate time because even though the atomic clock keeps almost perfect time, it does feel that it ebbs and flows.

And when our tracking of time is interrupted for Daylight Saving, it can take a week or so to adjust. For most of us our lives are fast paced, coloured by a sense of busyness – going here, going there, going everywhere, but maybe going nowhere.

In a recent book I just read written by the artist Thomas Kinkade, the lead character says: If our Lord did keep a timepiece, I wonder what it would be. His time is not in sync with our time. God's time is called Kairos and means the appointed time in the purpose of God. I believe that all will be revealed to us in God's own time. What comes after the Atomic Clock will happen when God feels it is time to reveal more of the mysteries of our universe.

As I mentioned before, time does seem to ebb and flow in our lives even though the atomic clock ticks away with a precision so hard to understand. There are special moments in our lives when we wish we could freeze-pane a particular moment. For me it was when I first held my children, when I first held my grandchildren. When I hold my husband's hand when we are going for a walk to the falls at our cottage on beautiful Manitoulin. When I am wrapped up with a good book or listening to a beautiful piece of music, watching the waves and clouds at my cottage. Spending special times with family and friends.

Volunteering at church for something that we felt nudged to do.

And when I experience those fleeting moments when I feel one with God.

But then there are those times when we wish the clock would speed up, waiting for test results, waiting for surgery and recovery time to be over. Waiting in line for Tim's or waiting for a special event.

Waiting, waiting, waiting. We have to be careful that we not fall in the never-ending cycle of waiting and try to find meaning in everything that is sent our way. I remember a CBC talk show a few years ago. The host said that we should enjoy some of these waiting times because in our busy lives an opportunity to rest can be welcome. I have always remembered that, and I don't fret at red lights – I look around briefly and take a moment to breathe. Listen to what is happening around us and perhaps we just might discover something beautiful and meaningful. We need the down times in order to appreciate the good times. Because when you are in the moment, time does seem to stop. My grandson Sam said that when he watches the clouds swoop across the sky, he does not notice the time.

Managing one's time is important. Time is a resource for stewardship in our Church. This precious gift of the donation of time makes our church tick tock away in beautiful

rhythm. Without it there would not be the church we love. Volunteering your time for anything makes a difference. Recent examples would fill this sermon – but many hands make light of the work that needs to be done.

There are courses galore on time management and I have taken a few of them. But life is so full of distractions that one's life can seem to be on a roller coaster with no meaning. Most times I plan my week at work and never accomplish my goals unless I shut myself out to the rest of the world.

This decade as the last one is being described as a time when we try to do way too much, that unless one is in a constant state of “doing” that we are not living. So, it is not just about keeping up with the physical Jones, it is about keeping up with the fast-paced Jones. We try to run the race faster. Breaking world and Olympic records for speed is seen as one of the highest accomplishments mankind can achieve.

Winning the Olympic gold medal for the 50-metre dash is seen as the ultimate achievement. I constantly hear people at work, and yes, here at our church, my own family and friends, who describe their lives to me as “I am so busy”. They do not say “I am so happy.” But I am so busy. Or I am bored as I am not as busy as I wish to be. What is this obsession with busyness? And then people who are not already retired who dream of being retired to do nothing! Or to do everything. It confuses me.

I am working on my own retirement plan but right now I just do not have time for it...whoops...yes, the time will come. So, what does all this time talk mean. Are we taking time to do what God is desiring and nudging us to do. Are we taking the time to discern what is really important? Taking time to study the bible, taking time to listen? Taking time to do something that takes us out of easy chairs and face the reason why we are here? Help out and volunteer if and when we can? Ask for help when we need to?

And taking time to pray. Meaningful prayer can do a lot for us and those we pray for.

Realizing that we are enveloped in the fabric of time, we can stretch it somewhat, but stretching it to much will cause something to break. Balancing our time is what is needed.

Yet as per Ecclesiastics 3:1-8, these wise words written so long ago and yet cross the ions of time to the present. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. So, there is a time to do things. Some of these will only be done once in a person's life. Others will be done on a daily basis. And nothing lasts forever except God's love. God's heart that is the beating at the centre of the universe spreading love, kindness, and hope everywhere. Beating to make us better people. God gave us his heart when he gave us Jesus.

We cannot go back in time except in our thoughts and memories. The past is the past upon which the present sits and becomes the future with hope and dreams. We work hard to predict when the next earthquake will happen or when the next volcano will erupt. We try to predict when a comet may strike the earth. Doctors predict birth times almost to the precise minute. Some people read horoscopes, read tea leaves, and go to fortune tellers. But we do not possess God's crystal ball.

Things will happen in their own time. Many times, you may say to yourself wow, that was perfect timing or that was a waste of time. We all can think of examples of when our timing was less than perfect. We can also think of special moments in our life that we dream to have perfect timing. We all know that Easter is the only religious holiday

that changes each year. Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. The emperor Constantine believed this and so it may fall in March or in April. 40 days back from this is the first Sunday of lent. Remember that 40 is a significant number. Talk about timing.

So let us journey back through time to almost two thousand years ago. We can do that in our minds. We can visualize what might have happened. Jesus is in the desert, discerning, questioning, learning, praying, and being tempted. But these 40 days are blocked from our peering eyes. Was Jesus procrastinating the inevitable or praying to God for us and not just himself? He left the desert to continue his mission. He didn't procrastinate; he knew what was going to happen, but he preached for three years, and he taught, and he told parables, and he prayed. And he took that most famous of walks through the streets of Jerusalem, ultimately to Golgotha.

We all have times when we procrastinate things we should be doing. And we all have these times of despair where we have to face our demons by ourselves where we need to be truly connected to God to discern our path. Not sure why this has to happen, but I do know that it is really simple. Just like time ebbs and flows so do our lives have ups and downs. Lent is a time to put us back in sync and balance.

If you want to be literal, Lent is the past tense of lend or "granting the use of a thing with the understanding that it just be returned or contributing or adding quality to." So, if you think of a more temporal explanation of this time period, it just makes perfect sense that we are being given a borrowed time in our busy lives to spend with God, to reflect which with prayer which will increase our understanding and give us clarity.

We do not have to go and spend 40 days in a desert or go camping in our frozen wilderness. Tuning ourselves up like a tuner tunes a piano, like a mechanic tunes a motor. We can get together and study and learn from each other. It is a real gift to look forward to Holy Week and then to the Easter Rising.

But by just not taking time to contemplate and make some personal sense of this time period we lose the true meaning of what Easter is about. The time is now to do this.

We live in difficult times. Sure, we have food to eat, a warm place to live, a wonderful church family, but our world has some awful things happening now, not just back in the days of Jesus when it was a time when the darkness of mankind was lit with true forgiveness. A time when mankind hovered in the ultimate sorrow and when the tears of heaven brought relief with true redemption, a time when the ultimate grief of a mother is turned to joy with knowing that her son lives in the hearts of all who believe and those who do not believe. All the emotion of mankind can feel is experienced during these days of lent making us feel truly alive.

Lent can give us some space to think about this with the knowledge that we are truly loved. Lent is a special time to most Christians. I personally do not give anything up as some of my good Catholic friends do, but I just add more prayer to my life and try to live simply, and it certainly helps me break up tax season which is a reality for me. It is a time to reflect, a time to take stock. It is a journey of the spirit and a purging of the soul. A time to bring it down a notch in leading up to a time when the ultimate miracles take place, the forgiveness of sins, and the revealing of true love. We are blessed. Life is not boring and there will be surprises along with the mundane. I hope each of you can make time in your lives to reflect and pray and discern during Lent. This ties into our Doing Discipleship program – where each of us is discerning what the future may hold for our church. Our time here on Earth is precious...spend it well.