

'I am the first and the last; beside me there is no god. Do not fear or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it?' (Isaiah 44.6-8)

**May I speak in the name of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

My children have all piled home this week – exhausted but excited – school uniforms discarded, books laid to one side, and lists of fun being written for the next six weeks because, of course, the summer holidays have begun! To my children six long weeks lie ahead – ample amounts of time in which to do little or to do much, but six long weeks free of school, of early mornings, and of course, free of homework.

Do you remember that feeling? When the gap between July and September feels like a lifetime and the joy of knowing that all this time stretches out ahead.

I, on the other hand have piled home this week – more exhausted than excited – knowing that name tapes need to be sewn into the new school uniforms (yet to be bought), that visitors are booked in through the Summer, and knowing that these six weeks will sail by in the blink of an eye – because I have grown-up to know very well just how short the summer holiday really is.

It's true isn't it, that as we get older, our concept of time changes. A day feels like an hour, a week feels like a day, and a decade feels like it is only a year.

'Time speeds up' as we get older and with this speeding up of the clock and the calendar an anxiety creeps in. We live with this sense of running out of time, or that something will be a waste of time, or annoyed that we are killing time in between key events. Sometimes it feels that there

simply aren't enough hours in the day, and that our lives are hurtling past us so quickly that we can easily be caught in the trap of filling what 'little' time we perceive we have, with frenetic activity to 'make the most of it'.

In my late teens and early twenties I worked as a waitress. I remember feeling at the time as though it was a dead-end job, a waste of time. As though there were something else I really ought to be doing, as I waited at the tables for the customers to come in I would often muse that there must surely be a better use of my time.

Our human ideas of how time should be spent can lead us to watch the seconds of the minutes of the hours ... anxiously trying and grasp some better or more productive control of this slice of life that we each have been given.

The problem with this anxiety is that it can lead to us measuring everything around us by the clock. Frustration when things don't happen quickly enough, or the anxiety of deadlines that seem to crowd in from a number of sides.

Once upon a time digital watches didn't exist, once upon a time, time could be watched by the shadow cast on a sundial, or even the physical rising and setting of the sun. But technology has additionally placed our society in a rather frantic march of time. Even a holiday can end up being cram-packed full of the many things we need to do in order to make the most of the time we have.

In amongst the weed and wheat analogy of our Gospel Reading this morning, we hear Jesus Christ talking to the crowds, and then the Disciples, about this human anxiety related to time. Maybe it isn't a solely modern thing to be in a rush and impatient for things to be dealt with ...

And as the weeds and the wheat grow up together in the field, the servants of the master are eager to go and sort them out ahead of the harvest time. I don't know about you, but I find myself agreeing – 'well – if a thing needs sorting, let's go and sort it out' with my mothers words 'A stitch in time saves nine' ringing in my ears. And surely this makes perfect sense, there is no point wasting time.

But the Master says 'No'.

'Let both of them grow and harvest time I will tell the reapers'.

In other words, wait, be patient, I will sort this.

This is true of my time waitressing. What I thought was a waste at the time was an incredibly good training ground for ministry. Unbeknownst to me back then, I was learning how to relate to all types of people, and how to serve. I wish I had known this then – maybe I would have been less anxious and more patient with the gradual unfolding of my life, by God.

There is a great deal of truth in the phrase 'Patience is a virtue' because patience deals with the temptation to make a god of time; in place of the One God, that we profess our faith in. Patience is the antidote to our human anxiety about time.

And this is crucial because the God we affirm our faith in, is actually timeless. He is the 'First and the Last' and He holds the whole of eternity in His sight. The seconds, the minutes, the hours, and the days that we each find ourselves seeking to count and control, are nothing in the vast expanse of God's sight.

I have a book called 'The Myths of Time'<sup>1</sup> which suggests that 'the way we deal with time is a choice'. He describes how uncertainty about the future lead to an anxious form of waiting, but in contrast art (and liturgy) lead us to be attentive to the present moment. It is true – if we are anxiously waiting while gazing on a painting, we can become impatient when the depths of the artwork don't unfold.

Liturgy is the same.

Now some of you might be wondering right now when I'm going to finish, trying to politely glance at your watch because there are Sunday papers to be read, or family waiting at home with fresh coffee and a walk planned for the rest of the day.

But you will note that there are rarely clocks inside churches. Because a church is a place of God's timelessness. In the church building there is both represented the past and the present day ... and the future ....  
Representations of eternity.

When we hear the repetition of those words first spoken by Jesus in the Upper Room over the original bread and the wine ... we, in one single moment remember the past, behold the present, and hope in the future – all three made simultaneously real in the bread and wine, in the body and blood, of Jesus Christ.

Communion is a criss-crossing of time, by God. A foretaste in the moment of now, of the humble meal of then, and the heavenly banquet of the future.

But why? Why does God seek to lead us into this place in this way? Why in the parable does Jesus take his disciples from a short-term impatience

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<sup>1</sup> Myths of Time by Hugh Rayment-Pickard (2004) DLT

into a promise of eternity when he 'will send his angels' to collect his Kingdom.

Because all our ideas of time and our ideas for the best use of it – are often contrary to God's ideas of time.

The way we deal with our time is a choice – so this morning, let us breathe deeply in the timeless encounter with God, in this place, and pray that we might take it out there into our lives.

Breathing patiently in the moment,  
trusting in God's unfolding,  
letting God be God.

Time is *not* the be all and end all.

God is.

**Amen.**