

THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE

Psalm 39

I am on my way to another funeral. There have been four (or has it been six?) in the past few days. Soon I will be reading the Psalms to the people (one is the 39th): "Lord, make me to know ...the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am". Suddenly, the first person pronouns stand sharply out--they snap at me as they must have to the Psalmist. He wasn't preaching to the people any more. You see--it suddenly hit him. He was having it, his time, all the time he was ever going to get. "before I go hence"; and not much time at that, so he better make it good, very, very good, by God, by God's grace. We cannot help but smile at the old boy, coming suddenly aware like that; the shock of recognition, "How frail I am!", seeing himself, balancing precariously, almost like an acrobat, on a thin time line and always about to topple; with nothing to hold on to, nothing that will hold him up except God. "My hope is in thee", he says, "God only!" How old is he anyway, this Psalmist, who suddenly sees his whole life on the line, and is not sure what he's doing with it, and a fear in his heart. So, any rate, one thing is certain to him--however old he is, he's older than he was.

I remember when I was a boy asking an uncle, (who seemed quite elderly to me, why he must have been at least 33), I asked him one afternoon, "what time is it?" He was a (...) *cagey* uncle. "I don't know what time it is for you," he said, "but the time for me is shortening up, Billy boy, shortening up." Maybe the Psalmist was this same age when time shortened up for him. Maybe the Psalmist had a shock or two--a death in the family, a catching of breath on the stair, a sudden sharp pain. I suppose it takes a shock of some sort for an old man of 33 to say to himself: "Time is shortening up for me". The end of the road is always for the other until suddenly, one day, it's for me. "For whom the bell tolls"? "It tolls for me!" I've already told some of you about answering the phone last winter. The man on the phone, not knowing he was talking to me, said "Old Dr. Bennett is dead, isn't he?" "Not that I know of", I said. "Well, I thought he ought -a be . He's been there long enough." I may have *FORSHORTEN* laughed, but I felt time shorten up with a jerk. "How long, O Lord?"

And it's just as well, I think. Maybe it's necessary to feel (...) *is there such a word as forshosten?* --to feel a bit of eternity impinging upon the heart. One need not shed tears with the 39th Psalmist, though that's

all right too: better honest tears at time's shrinking than a fakey, grinning courage. Maybe one should risk Geritol or jogging. One man viewing a coffin said to another, "Doesn't he look just fine?" The other answered, "Well, he ought to—he jogged all the time!" So cry or laugh as life shortens up. I'll laugh.

And this reminds me, I once knew an old man who laughed at time and understood it best of all. I say "knew" him—at least he lived across the street from my eating club when I was a student at Princeton. When he passed on the way to and from the institute where he worked we nodded at each other, this old gentleman and I. That was the extent of our acquaintance. He too was a refugee, Like the 39th Psalmist, "a stranger," "a sojourner" and soon to die. He had a theory about time, this old man did, a theory which he, at least, understood. One Saturday night, the boys had him (and his sister) over for dinner to apologize for the noise we had been making on previous Saturday nights and have him explain his incomprehensible theory. "When you sit with a nice girl for two hours", he said, "you think it's only a minute. But when you sit on a hot stove for a minute, you think it's two hours. That's relativity!" And he shook his grisly mane and chuckled his (...) *GERMAN* chuckle. There was a brass nameplate on the door of his house across the street: "A. Einstein", it read.

looks like (UNIVERSE)
He was one of God's strange and strong ones, and as such, a sojourner in ceaseless search of what he called "The old man of the (...). He knew that the time of his or anybody's else's life is altogether dependent upon its content—what is put in it. He, for one, was never bored, never empty—till the end he had the time of his life. Truth is, if you don't put anything in your life time you don't really have it. It doesn't make any difference how long it lasts. You have to put something into your time to pass it at all.

It was Daisy who was always whining and (..) , "What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon, and the day after that, and the next 30 years?" Remember Daisy in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby? Poor Daisy, just "passing time" must be a very great sin, for "killing time" is killing life, the only one we've got.

So, I better ask myself—"What on this earth am I doing with the time I have left? --killing it or fulfilling it? Maybe if we kill time here—we also kill our chance for eternity. There's a
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south Georgia tombstone, between Buena Vista and a place called Plains, that reads: "I hope there's a future world, where I can have some bliss, for the Lord knows, I've sure made a mess of this!"

Maybe that's the reason Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven begins now. "What time is it"? "Now is always the time". To wait is too late. And there is, says the new testament, only one way to fulfill the time of your life, really to possess it to the full--so that you might wish it to be eternal--and it's so simple. Almost no one believes it; but nothing is so important, and it is (Oh, you won't believe me--I don't think I'll tell you.) Our minds are like an unslept in bed--always made up. It is to be kind--just to be kind for kindness is the best translation of that Christian word for "love"--"be kind to your neighbor, your enemy, even your family". "Be kind." Nine times out of ten kind parents have a happy child, kindness keeps couples together--plain ordinary kindness.

How many childhoods are starved for kindness! How many tortured adults will never ever really have the time of their lives because they never had a kind parent, a kind husband or wife, or a kind friend.

A girl, Emily, in Thornton Wilder's Our Town, says to her mother, after death has come between them, very much the way life came between them: "Oh, mama, can't you look at me now, one minute, as though you really saw me.....Do any human beings ever realize life while they have it? -- every, every minute?" "They look at me, but they never see me."

How many little boys, grown up are still longing : "Oh, Dad, Dad, just look at me, just one minute as though you really saw me." I recall a 50 year old man--all his life he had felt invisible because he wanted so to be wanted as a child.

Or here is a little old lady, whose family gives her much money, but little kindness, so the time of her life is so empty, when it could be so full.

In Christian theology, there is surely this connection between kindness and time: the kindness of God in Christ the Lord, "the time of salvation", and the sharing of it in the family of man is "the time of the kingdom".

Oh--what I'm trying to say is-- time is killed where no love is; but where love is, time becomes eternity . It's the gospel truth. The proof is in the experience. Try it, for now is the time of your life--here and now, you're having it--so you better make it good--very, very good, by God's grace.

Let us pray

O Lord, the prophet just talked about a time --when thy spirit would animate all flesh. The early Christian thought that time had finally come in the spirit descending on them at Pentecost. And here we are still talking and often still failing to fulfill the time by just being plain kind-- kind to all kinds, as our Lord was kind. So defend us, O Lord, from so much learning and so little love. Talk is killing us while life evades us. Teach us to care, to care for Christ's sake. That's the real Pentecost.