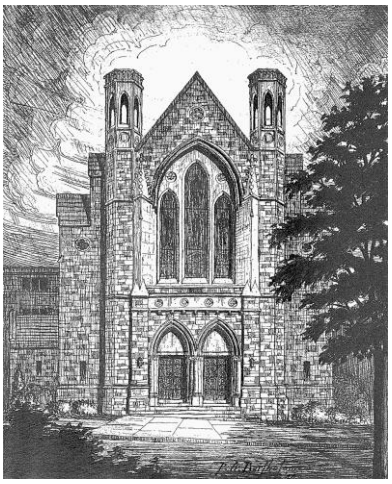

The Lord of Time

Isaiah 2:1-5 & Matthew 24:36-44
Advent 1 - November 30, 2025
Rev. Dr. Martin R. Ankrum

The story is told about an occurrence some many years ago at an airport in Pakistan:

There were several businessmen at a conference who got away from the last meeting late and were pretty sure that they would miss their flight. The four of them raced to find a taxi for time was short. They paid a handsome tip to the cabbie so that he might press the speed limit a bit and get them to the airport, for time was short. They arrived at the departures area and raced through the terminal, all seeking the gate that was printed on their boarding passes. They ran through the crowded terminal, bobbing and weaving against the tremendous crowd of travelers because time was short.

As they ran, two of them, not watching where they were going, ran into a table filled with bags of apple that a young woman was selling. Everything went flying … the bags, the apples and the two businessmen. They got up and just started running again, because time was short and they had to get to that gate to make the flight.

When they arrived at their gate, they started boarding the plane except for one of the two guys who knocked over the table. He hung back, looking at his boarding pass, looking up at the big electronic board with the arriving and departing flights and all the time thinking, 'time is money' and 'time is short' and then he just silently turned around and walked away from the gate and his three friends.

Today, in the gospel reading Jesus tells us that time is short. Rather, he indicates that time has an ending point. He relates to his listeners that time is not an ever-rolling stream that just keeps flowing, but rather there will be a hard stop one day to the cycles and the seasons of time and that behind all of that is God himself and not just some gigantic asteroid plunging silently and threateningly towards earth. Jesus makes it quite clear that it is God who owns time and not us.

Being a part of the people of God changes our view of time or at least it should. Today, the rest of the world proclaims that it is the third day into the Christmas shopping season. The church, all contradictory toward the normal course of things, proclaims that today is the first day of the new year. Yes, that's right, here in the sanctuary of First Presbyterian, it is the start of a new liturgical year … it is Advent.

Advent reminds us that time does not flow on endlessly but originates and ends both in the gracious embrace of a loving God. Jesus wants his hearers to be conscious of the time; to make good use of the time that they have been given and to be about the things that pertain to God … things like love and mercy and grace in the midst of the time that has been given to us.

One of my favorite prayers for the Witness to the Resurrection, the funeral service in the Presbyterian Church, is this one:

Eternal God: our days and years are lived in your mercy. Make us know how frail we are, and how brief our time on earth; and lead us by your Holy Spirit, so that, when we have served you in our generation, we may be gathered into your presence, faithful in the church, and loving toward neighbors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

What is wonderful to me about this prayer is the emphasis upon both the realization that time is a gift from God, a boundary of a beginning and an end, that is to be received as such and then is to be used in a specific way. That way that is specified or indicated by the prayer is that we ought to be about the

things of God in the living out of the time we are granted … we are called to be faithful and loving. These are the keys elements of how the human creature, that beloved creation of God, is to spend its time: being faithful to God and loving to neighbors.

In Jesus' words this day, we are assured that our time is held by God. This time is not something that we are just thrown into all higgly-piggly, but rather we are set in this time, gifted with the time that we do have by the God who has made time for us. In God's great gift of creation, He who is beyond time has actually created and made time, the very concept of time and its reality for us, for the human creature. This is the gifted nature of time, no matter how short it may seem or now matter if it seems to drag on and on and on, it is the gift of God for us.

My favorite theologian has said something significant about this tremendous gift in a sermon he once preached to a congregation of inmates at his local prison:

My time does not roll along like a skittle-ball hurled by some unseen hand. It does not tremble like an aspen leaf in the wind. It is secure. It is held. It is carried. It is safeguarded. It is not secure because I am perhaps such a steadfast fellow; after all, none of us is that. It is secure because it is in God's hands. What is in God's hands is secure. So my yesterday is secure, my today, and my tomorrow, with everything that belongs there, whether hidden or open to view. So my time, my life story, I myself have been secure by God's decree for a long time, from long before I was born and so from all eternity. And it will continue to be secure: not only until my death, but beyond it, forever. Nothing, nothing at all of what came then and still comes into existence and now is, will ever be lost, forgotten or obliterated. I am, I shall live, though I were dead, because my life is secure in God's hands.

And because our lives, our time are secure in God's hands, we can really live. We can take Jesus' admonition to stop worrying about the time and date of our end or the end of all the world and go about the business of living the life that God has granted us. We can take the day that we have been given and learn again and again, with each new day to live faithfully to God and lovingily toward neighbor as that favorite prayer of mine states. We can really live knowing that time is not in our hands, but secure in God's hands.

Remember that businessman I told you about at the opening of the sermon. Well, I forgot to end the story. If you recall, he had been in a hurry through the airport terminal because time was short. He and his companions made it to the gate in time, but not before they had upset a table filled with apples in bags, being sold by someone in the airport. Here's where the story picks back up …

The one businessman bid his friends goodbye and turned and walked back through the terminal, knowing that he was going to miss his flight and have to take a later flight. Time was no longer short for him, for time now had a purpose and meaning, it had the texture of compassion and humility and no longer was rushed by artificial and imposed boundaries. Time now meant something different to him.

He found the table still upset, the apples all over the terminal floor, some being kicked by passer-byes, others just rolling about. He found the young girl, sitting by the table on her knees crying.

He stopped and saw that the girl was blind and that this was her business to sell apples to travelers and bring some kind of income to her family. He whispered in her ear that he would help her and he began to pick up all the apples he could find and put them in bags. He straightened up the table, returned her chair to the right spot and then pushed several large bills into her hand saying, 'This will pay for all the damages and the lost apples.'

As he walked off toward his gate knowing that he had several hours to wait for the next flight home, he heard the girl ask into the space that he had just occupied: 'Sir, are you Jesus? … Are you Jesus?'

May the time you have be spent in such a way that others might mistake you for the Lord of love … the Lord of time.