

# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “MAKING OUR TIME COUNT”

Scripture Lesson: 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, November 17, 2024  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

1 Corinthians 13: 1-3

### **The Gift of Love**

*1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

### **Making Our Time Count**

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Dr. Rogers opened last Wednesday's chapel service with a comment about a youth group meeting which began with him saying something along the lines of, "Tonight we are going to be talking about sin," to which one of the students responded, "Oh, no."

We sometimes have a similar response when we consider the end of days, our days, the end of time. Of course, about that time, we do not know.

What we do know is that we have a precious and limited amount of time here on this earth. While we do sin and continually fall short of the glory of God, ours is nonetheless a blessed task to number our days and to make our time count!

I've shared the story with some of you about our son Harrison and our nightly rituals when he was young. Each night before turning in we would each offer an original prayer, but sometimes an old favorite would come to mind.

I remember offering one such prayer, one that you probably recall from your childhood. "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."

On the night I offered that prayer, I opened my eyes to check and make sure that Harrison paying attention, we parents do that from time to time, and I happened to glance at Harrison during the part of the prayer that says, "If I should die before I wake."

As those words rolled off my tongue, Harrison's peaceful expression turned somewhat sour, and a furrowed brow accompanied a searching glance of his own. It was the kind of precious and unconscious reaction that comes from having encountered one of life's new lessons.

For just as there is a time to be born, there is also a time to die. I think, at some level, Harrison understood that; however, as he rolled over on his side and snuggled up to his blanket, he removed his thumb from his mouth just long enough to say, "Daddy, I'm not going to die tonight. I haven't lived long enough."

I often wonder on our journey from childhood to adulthood when it is that we lose that childlike sense of immortality; when the work we have yet to do ceases to be the joyful endeavor that it was intended to be and instead becomes a matter of toil. When does it happen in our lives that the future no longer seems so fresh and new?

With age and the accumulation of life's experiences, our wisdom as well as our insatiable appetite for knowledge, grows stronger. Ours becomes a yearning, a craving to understand life and death, sin and grace. And so it happens with time, the wide-eyed wonder inside each of us, begins to squint.

It has been this way from the dawn of time. Adam and Eve had an abundance of life, but they were tempted to want knowledge and understanding.

The tree from which they ate was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and upon eating it, their innocence was lost. It brought forth from them fear and shame and separation. It brought forth thorns and birth pains and more but consider that theirs was only a portion of the knowledge that the Lord our God possesses.

Imagine if into their minds the full expanse of knowledge had been uploaded! Imagine knowing every joy and every heartbreak, every advancement of civilization and every nation that would crumble, the kindness and the evil, the good and the bad, the truthful and the untruthful.

Friends, our minds couldn't handle the weight of that kind of knowledge; goodness knows, our hearts wouldn't be able to take it! And so, God, who knows everything, has determined to give us a little bit at a time!

In Deuteronomy 29:29 we are told: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law."

So, there is knowledge that we do have, and some things are revealed to us. Granted, we see them dimly, and, as the Apostle Paul reminded us, "Now we know only in part."

In our Old Testament reading this morning, the author of Ecclesiastes makes it clear that even though we may be limited in our capacity to understand what God has done from the beginning to the end, God is ceaselessly and relentlessly concerned about us and creation, and God provides a time for every matter under heaven.

We recently had someone in the life of our church family move from the intensive care unit and into a regular room and even more recently they moved to a rehab facility. No sooner do we hear that good news than we hear of a person having a medical emergency and who was headed into the hospital.

I found myself repeating a similar mantra: there is a time for sickness and a time for health.

At the end of this past week, I finally made time to take down the last of our Halloween decorations, and after having spread some winter rye grass, I have no idea if it will grow. I sort of stepped back and admired a job well done. Things finally looked a little more orderly.

Later that day I was watching the news, and I was reminded of the yards of some of our neighbors in western North Carolina, how many of them are still in complete disarray.

I found myself repeating a similar mantra: there is a time for chaos and a time for order.

To be certain, the loving hands of God envelop every moment and every matter under heaven, and that should tell us, among other things, that there is meaning and purpose in life.

I dare say that the only reason the work of our lives encounters challenges at all is because we live on this side of heaven, where we see in that mirror dimly.

But Paul reminds us that, "then;" one day, not now, but some glad morning when this life is over, we will see face to face! "Now we know only in part," Paul says, "but 'then' we will know fully, even as we have been fully known."

So, we have that to look forward to, but what about now? What do we make of the time we have today? Is it God-filled? Is it sacred? Can it be sacred?

The story is told of a little girl named Lilly who was absolutely convinced that God was everywhere, and she was determined to see God everywhere. She tiptoed in her garden whispering, "I know you're here, God." She saw some tiny ants. "You must be very small, God, to fit into them." She lay down in the grass and looked up at the sky and she said, "But, God, you are also very big." She picked some flowers, held them in her hand, and said, "I bet you are here, too, God." Before she went inside, a little brown squirrel came close, sniffing around near her feet, and she whispered, "Are you saying 'hi' for God?"

Now that's certainly not the best theology, but perhaps, in principle, it's not a bad way to approach life, to see God's providential hand at work in creation, in all the creatures great and small, to see God in the lives of others.

I dare say, that God can be at work in the world around us in the mundane just as much as he can be at work in the miraculous.

Take Moses, for example. The burning bush was extraordinary, but that was revealed to Moses from within the seemingly ordinary and everyday task of tending sheep. In other words, it was in Moses' everyday life that God changed his life.

You know the statements that are attributed to the great reformer Martin Luther. "The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays, not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps, but because God loves clean floors."

One of the points Martin Luther was trying to make is that God desires each of us to make the most of the time we must glorify and enjoy Him. Indeed, that is ultimately the task to which we are all called. That is to be our chief end in life.

To glorify and enjoy the one who first loved us. Consider again the promises that God makes to us in the waters of baptism.

At our 11:15 service of worship, we will acknowledge Dimitri Bohren's previous baptism. He was baptized a few weeks ago. Please know, that we do not baptize him a second time, because God has made it abundantly clear that what God does once, he does once and for all. God's love, revealed in the waters of baptism, tells us loud and clear that divine love claims us long before we can respond in faith. It tells us that our time, and the time of our children, has meaning and direction.

Some of you know that next week I will be touring some of southern California's earliest Spanish missions. In the mid-1700s when the world's empires were expanding and settling, these were religious outposts for Christianity.

One of the things I am especially looking forward to is experiencing the sounds of the bells. You may have heard our bell ringing this morning, our bell is in the north tower.

The bells of the southern missions that I will be visiting functioned in much the same way as many bells did at that time in history -- they hung in iconic towers and they would signal to the community what time it was, tolling the hours of the day. They would ring for prayer, for meals, and for times of celebration. They would even serve as a means of warning when the community was in danger!

For our purposes this morning, I would add that the bells served as a powerful witness to the importance of time. Its progressions, its constancy, and its inevitability. In so many ways, the church also asserting time and faith have something very important in common. They both belong to God!

It begs the question, "If our time is really that important to God, shouldn't our lives bear witness to that reality? Should we not structure the time that we have been given in faithful ways? Making our time count with prayer and purpose and service and community?"

Do our lives toll with any audible sound that would catch someone's attention and draw them closer so that they might witness that in our lives we structure them around a God who cares how we spend our time?

Do the things we say and the things we don't say or the things we do and the things we don't do ring true? Or are we just noisy gongs and clanging symbols?

"I'm not going to die tonight; I haven't lived long enough." Harrison forever changed that little bedtime prayer for me, because now I find myself asking the question: "What if I should die before I live?"

Jesus transforms our understanding of life and death and everything in between. We know that the time God has set aside for every matter under heaven are occasions when the purposes of God can be accomplished. God has determined that the heart and mind of Christ is given voice in our voices.

But know this, we can't live out the claims of the Gospel in every matter under heaven, unless we actually live out the claims of the Gospel in every matter under heaven!