

**PONDERING TIME**  
Randall Tremba  
August 16, 2009  
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

**Ephesians 5:15-20**

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time.

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In case you haven't noticed I've been away for a while. Twelve weeks and twelve Sundays to be exact. Absence, they say, makes the heart grow fonder and I have indeed grown fonder of you. I missed being here and being with you.

This sabbatical leave, my second in 34 years, was intended to release me from the grind of a long-term ministry. I use the word "grind" loosely since most of what I do around here is fun and joyful. But a break like this after so many years in one place is truly refreshing and re-energizing.

I have served this congregation since 1975, preaching more than 1500 sermons. I've taken an average of 6 Sundays off year, four for vacation, two for continuing education. And because of an amazingly good gene stock from my parents, in 34 years I've not had to take a single Sunday off due to illness. Thank you, mom and dad!

This sabbatical leave was a combination of two vacation weeks, six accumulated study leave weeks, plus four extra weeks. Thank you for granting me this time away. I hope it was as good for you as it was for me.

I've heard things went quite well for the most part in my absence. I'm glad they didn't go too well otherwise I might be in the unemployment line next week. I know there's been glitches and snags but, don't forget, there are plenty of those when I'm here too. Things happen.

I am very grateful for the able and apt leadership of Ethel Hornbeck plus so many others who stepped up to assist with Sunday morning services and other programs. Thank you one and all.

By the way, I heard Ethel managed the Sunday morning liturgy so efficiently that most services ended with time to spare. I thought you should know that she has passed to me about 60 rollover minutes. Not to worry, I won't use them all today.

During this sabbatical time I've had more free time than usual. I had planned to spend a lot of time on my bike mentally unwinding by riding long and winding roads. But the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry if not *kaput*. Mine went *kaput*!

On May 22nd, the very first week of my sabbatical, I pedaled from Shepherdstown through Summit Point down to Millwood, Virginia. On the way back, about mile 60 of an 80-mile ride, another biker suddenly appeared behind me and while passing lost control of the bike, veered into mine. We both hit the asphalt going 25 mph. OUCH time. We both ended up in the emergency room with serious injuries. Fortunately, we were both wearing helmets otherwise I might not be telling you this story, or at least not at this tempo!

It took me nearly three weeks to recover. Here's what I learned from that fall: It doesn't take much time to get hurt. It takes a long time to mend. And I don't just mean bodily hurts.

And so with biking temporarily suspended, I turned my attention to my sabbatical book project, composing and assembling a study book for our confirmation and new members class. Without that *untimely* crash I might have put that project off forever. I'm quite good at procrastination.

As I learned once again, time is not completely under our control. But all time is a gift and like any gift it may be used wisely or unwisely.

*Be careful then how you live; not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.*

I am happy to report that during my sabbatical I did not "get drunk with wine" although I did fall into another kind of intoxication. During a whole week in Albuquerque with my 10-month old granddaughters, Angie and Paula, I was enraptured by their zany antics. Besides sleeping, eating, making messes and making us laugh, they use most of the rest of their time trying to reach over, through or under every conceivable barrier mom and dad have erected around the boundaries of their world.

You can set them and re-set them and re-set them in the middle of the room surrounded by a plethora of toys and gadgets but they will not be content for long. They simply are not content with any *assigned* place in this world. They want more. They are, after all, becoming human and humans simply can't resist "forbidden fruit" of any kind. Our endless quest for knowledge is what makes us human and sometimes tormented.

Paula and I had a lot of time to laugh. The Grand Tetons, the Grand Canyon and the grand twins filled us with grand delight. But there were times to weep as well.

At the end of June my friend of 40 years died suddenly leaving behind two young sons. Rosemary was one of Paula and my dearest friends. Our children called her "Aunt Rosie." I can't imagine this planet without her.

In early July, while in Phoenix, I received a call from Ethel that Harriet Arthur had died, suddenly and unexpectedly just two months short of her 90th. Harriet's health was fragile but you'd hardly know it by the way she grabbed life by the horns and dared it to throw her off.

And speaking of grabbing life by the horns, the 20-year-old son of one of our friends in California told me his new passion was riding bulls. He said it cost \$20 for just one ride. And for that, I asked, how long are you allowed to ride? As long as you can, he said. Which turns out to be about seven seconds tops. But the ride, he said, is worth it.

Evidently, it's not the *amount* of time that matters; it's the *kind* of time.

Harriet grabbed life by the horns and dared it to throw her off. It's not the amount of time that matters; it's the kind of time. As a billboard in California put it: *you only live once. Make sure it's enough.*

Harriet had planned to spend her 90th birthday in a lighthouse. I'd like to think she will—more so than she ever dreamed of.

Lately I've been pondering time. The young like my granddaughters with so much time ahead of them; the old with more time behind than ahead.

At Bryce Canyon, Paula and I gazed through powerful telescopes at stars, star clusters and constellations in the extraordinarily dark sky above. Light from a million years ago is just now reaching the earth. Imagine that! I pondered that kind of time until my brain nearly burst.

At the Grand Canyon I pondered time again, the time it took the Colorado River, wind and rain to carve that spectacular canyon. In the wake of relentless erosion something beautiful emerged that takes our breath away. Millions of people from all around the world stand in awe at that site every year.

The Grand Canyon should give hope to those of us who are beginning to show the effects of weathering and erosion. Gravity and adversity may take their toll on body and souls but over time they etch something beautiful in our character, if you only have eyes to see.

Time is a gift to receive with gratitude. Some times are hard—sometimes very, very hard. But all times are full of grace. A lot depends on your point of view.

*Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time. Be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts giving thanks to God at all times.*