

What To Do With The Time That Is Given Us:
Become A Saint

Grace Episcopal Church
Proper 27
24th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Brian C Justice

+

Isaiah 25.6-9
Psalm 24
Revelation 21.1-6
John 11.32-44

+

O Holy God of Love, O Flame Divine,
Take our hearts
And set them on fire.
Amen.

+

In *The Lord of the Rings*, that masterful Christian allegory by JRR Tolkien, a dialogue takes place between the hobbit Frodo Baggins and the wizard Gandalf. They are speaking just as the perilous – but ultimately victorious – adventure is about to begin.

Frodo said, “I wish it need not have happened in my time.”

“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

Surveying the last quarter of a century – from one viewpoint, at least – it might be easy for us to feel like Frodo.

9/11.

War in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Environmental degradation.

Economic dislocation.

Media disinformation.

Political corruption.

Public divisiveness.
Pandemic.

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.

“So do I,” said Gandalf.

+

Our experience confirms what our Scriptures and our Theology proclaim: that mortal life *is* marked by a certain kind of mystery.

Part of that mystery Scripture and Theology call ‘sin.’

On one level, ‘sin’ is a thought, a word, or a deed that transgresses God and our neighbor. On a deeper level, ‘sin’ is a fundamental *separateness* from God and our neighbor.

It is not something that *we do*, it is something that *we are*.

... when we are *separated from* ...

Indeed, when we look at our lives in this world, we can understand ‘sin’ as a description of our existential condition and its consequences:

- there is estrangement ...
- there is incompleteness ...
- there is harm...
- there is hurt ...
- there is brokenness ...

The story of the people of Israel – the story of the Bible – is a metaphor of the whole human condition:

Adam and Eve lost the Garden of Eden...

Cain murdered Abel, *his own brother*...

Noah saw destruction wrought by a great flood ...

The People of Israel

- suffered famine, disease, drought, and war...
- were divided amongst themselves and were attacked by others...
- were enslaved in a foreign land...
- were exiled in the Wilderness...

We can readily imagine an Israelite expressing Frodo's feeling,
"I wish it need not have happened in my time."

Indeed, the book of Deuteronomy, which is the last book of the Torah, ends
with the People of Israel not in the Promised Land, but in the Wilderness!

When the Torah ends, the people are still on the Journey in the Wilderness.
Traveling toward the Promised Land, but not there yet.

And, in a sense, that is where we live. That is where we are.
On the Journey. In the Wilderness.

The question is ... how are we going to live there?

Or, asked as Gandalf asked it:
what are we going to do with the time that is given us?

+

Well ... we are going to become saints.
You and I are going to be saints.
We are called to be saints.

Usually we think of the saints as the shadowy figures of history
or the sun-lit figures in stained glass windows.
Distant people. Different people. People really not like us.

But that's not true. That's not true at all.

The saints are *human beings* ... but human beings who – on the Journey, in the Wilderness
– relate to life *just a little bit differently*, participate in life *just a little bit differently*.

The saints see and hear what the writer of the Book of Revelation sees and hears.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth...

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
'See, the home of God is among mortals.
God will dwell with them...'

The one who was seated on the throne said,
'See, I am making all things new...' (21.1-3, 5)

One of our three Bishops here in the Diocese of Virginia, Bishop Porter Taylor, writes, “Sainthood is not about stigmata or visions or levitating or making the sun stand still or miraculous healings. It is about being so connected to the love of God ... that this love radiates out from you in your life...”¹

St Irenaeus – 2nd century, France – said, “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.”

And that is who the saints are.

Ordinary human beings fully alive
with the extra-ordinary Love that is God.

+

You and I are going to be saints.

The place to do it is HERE; the time to do it is NOW.

Right here ‘in the Wilderness’; right now ‘on the Journey’.

This is not about waiting until you die.

This is about now.

Do it now.

Be a saint now.

The ‘communion of saints’ is a present reality. Forever present. Forever now.

Even in this life – “among mortals” – in the middle
of suffering and separation,
of war and want,
of disease and desolation,
which are there, which are real
– we cannot deny it –
even so,
there is the Good News ... there is the Gospel.

And the Gospel is this...

God is Love and “the home of God is among mortals.”

¹ Bishop Porter Taylor, A Meditation for All Saints Day, November 1, 2021.

Love is the gravitational force that holds everything together.
Love is here. Love is now.
Love is all around us.

We have got to spread it.
You and I.
And especially to the poor, the sick, the weak, and the lonely.
You and I.

The Church is the only organization whose sole purpose is serve the people who don't belong to it.

We have got to go out that door and give it away.

If we can just try to live in this Love together ...
If we can just try to give this Love away together
– and we give it away
by giving our time, our talent, our treasure,
by smiling ...by saying “How are you?” ... by saying “Thank you”
by showing up ... *by showing up* –
if we can try to do this ...
then ... something unbelievable happens...

Our hands are the hands of God.
Our smiles are the smiles of God.
Our hearts are the heart of God
Our faces are the face of God
to the people we meet, in the places we meet them.

We are the repairers of the breach,
the restorers of the streets,
the builders of the Kingdom...

We are the city on the hill,
the salt of the earth,
the light in the darkness.

We *are* the Good News...
We *are* the Gospel...
We *are* the communion of saints ...

I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.
I live ... you live ... together we live ... moment-by-moment
right here

right now
in God
in the communion of saints ...

We *are* Christ on the Journey, in the Wilderness.
We *are* the communion of the saints.

+

Frodo said, "I wish it need not have happened in my time."

"So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

Let us answer that question with the resolve to try to be what we are called to be.

Let us be saints.

As we live into that calling, I invite you to join me and pray together with me the prayer of that beloved saint, St Francis of Assisi.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console,
To be understood, as to understand,
To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive
And it is in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.