

The Commitment – Time, Presence, and Service

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*Preached at Lower Merion Baptist Church
Sunday, November 14, 2004; Bryn Mawr, PA*

Mark 8:34-38; 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

“But strive for the greater gifts.”

If there is one thing we have little of, it is time. Time slips through our fingers, it eludes us, and we are constantly in need of more. We have our time management conferences, which I would surely attend if I only had the time, we have technology, which is designed to give us more time, but I haven't yet found the hours I need to learn how to use it. Many of us seem to be running from one point to the next in search of the illusive free time but can never find it. Maybe you know the words, which the narrator speaks in the beginning of the Soap, *Days of Our Lives*? “Like sand in the hour glass....” Yet it seems that the space in the middle of the hourglass has enlarged, and the grain is falling through at an alarming speed.

What scares me most about our lack of time is the way our culture has embraced it especially with the word “busy.” We all want to feel busy (or at least we feel guilty when we aren't), don't we? Thoreau said, “It is not enough to be busy... The question is: What are we busy about?” We add more and more into our lives, we take on yet another thing, we increase

our responsibilities and our time becomes even scarcer, but is our life full? Did you know that for many people, to be “busy” means to be important? The word has become a stigma of power and significance – after all if one is very busy, than that person's time is very valuable, and that person must have a lot of importance. There is a *VegeTales* sketch, which parodies this idea of being busy equals being important. A cucumber is stuck in a hole, but the asparagus doctor, and mayor are too busy to help the poor fellow out. This points out the narcissistic, self-absorbed self-importance of “being busy.” So often I have found that to be busy means that one is hiding, one is lacking substance, one is stretched thin, one is not in focus, and one is not living, truly living. Think about this, the more you have in your life, the more likely it is that your life is empty. One e-mail story that has been going around describes Satan trying to conduct a plan to seduce the human race, and he decides to make them busy so that humans cannot truly live. The story ends with the anachronism BUSY = Being Under Satan's Yolk. Hand in hand with the phrase, “I'm busy” is found the hand, “I have no time.” Remember we all have the same amount of time, it depends how we choose to use our time.

What I think happens is that we are all stretched thin, and we loose ourselves in the race to accomplish as much as possible in as short of time as possible. In the climax of the film, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, the main character played by Robin Williams finds himself in the classic comedic scheduling snafu. He has two important dinners to attend at the same time and runs from one to the other in drag, and his “street clothes.” Eventually, as the pace quickens, and the wine flows freely, Williams forgets when he is Mrs. Doubtfire, and when he is not, ending in the predictable

confrontation with both parties. Do you see – he stretched himself, and in the process of juggling everything, he lost himself. Do you see that is the risk that we are facing as well in our time deficit, as we run from one thing to the next? Time is something that we all need, but something that we seem to have in short supply.

So today I am not going to ask you for your time, instead I am going to ask for your presence. Lets be honest, so many of you are giving all the time that you have to the church, and others may want to give more, but have nothing to give because the rest of their life is full with obligations. What does that leave us with but an exhausted, stretched, and tired community? So how can I stand here and ask you to find a little more time to offer to the church, when already you may be burning the candle at both ends? And what worries me more is not how much time you have (remember that we all have the same amount of time), but how you may be spending your time in the church. The business of the church should not be mundane, tedious and a necessity that we have to bear through. We don't get through the business part of the church so we can move back to worship. We can't separate ourselves from the meetings and the worship. They are all one. This is not a club that you join. This is not a social group complete with hazing rituals, membership dues, business meetings and golf outings. We are not just another institution with bi-laws, constitutions, and books to keep. No, this is the gathered body of Christ, the mystical union of believers, the Church of Jesus Christ, One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. All that we do is an action within and on behalf of the Church. All that we do is worship and service in one way or another. This is not something that you give your time to out of obligation. You

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are a Christian now, and you are called to live life differently through Christ and the Church. So I'm not asking for your time, I'm asking for your commitment. Christ is not asking for a scheduled slot in your day planner – Christ is asking for your life. This is what Paul is stressing with the Corinthian community – “you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” It is a sense of becoming, of changing, or entering into a new way of existing. You may look at your life, and you may feel like you are a sports coach trying to guide and direct an entire team – I am suggesting that you let the team go and focus on one athlete, focus on one part of your life – Christ. So I am not asking for your time for yet another board, I am asking for your presence, your self, all of who you are to become a follower of Jesus, to enter the Church and become a part of the holy body of Christ.

When we enter the church as a follower of Jesus, there is a catch. We are not joining a specific church; instead God is calling us to BE the church. This is a lot to consider. If you are giving your time to the church and it is bleeding you dry, it is wearing you out, if you are not receiving any kind of spiritual food from your time in the church, then we have become just like any institution, and our institution will suffer. We are not *being* the church, and something needs to change. If you do not feel free, but weighed down, if you do not feel as if you can taste, experience, and truly know that you are saved, because you haven't the moment to stop and experience, then you are not the church but serving expectations, and something needs to change. Now this doesn't mean that we have to stop doing the entire minutia that we do, but it does mean that we need to readdress our approach. We are called to be the body of Christ, and Paul nicely

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offers us a metaphor to understand what that means. We are all called to specific parts of that body. If people, who are called to be the feet of the body, are trying to do all the writing, they will wear themselves out. Or more specifically, if someone is called to teach, can that person be an administrator, or a prophet? So ask yourself, are you being the part of the church that you are called to be? We are called to leave worship not as a spectator, but as a working gear of the body of Christ, performing the ministry of Christ with this gathered people, allowing worship to give us the fuel, but then letting the machine, the mechanics itself work. I am asking all of you who are doing things, which are not fulfilling to stop, and pray, and follow God's lead, as you become a stronger part of the church. Have you ever read Plato's *Republic*? In this, Plato suggests a utopia that works because everyone holds to his or her specifically ascribed tasks. And while Plato's ideas are not the church as formed by God, the idea holds a relevancy to the church. We need each one of you, but we need you to follow the gifts that God has given to you. God is calling all of us not to give our time, not to serve, but to be the church.

Then the church will become the good news of Christ that we preach – a place where life is given and received. The church will be a place where we will grow as Christians, and in our gifts, where love and acceptance will be celebrated and your presence will be appreciated. Yet we have to take some risks. We will have to risk giving ourselves to Christ and to the community. First we have to realize that this life isn't ours, it belongs to God. We have to realize that the only way we can truly live life is to live it through Jesus – any other way will lead to despair, sadness, and death. We give our lives to Christ, we realize that we are forgiven; we

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realize that Christ died for each and every one of us so that we might have the grace to live, and we give all that we are to the church through the commitment to Christ. But here is the blessing, when we are giving to the church in this sacrificial way, when we are giving through the ministries that have been put before us, we will begin to receive joy, hope, and the sense of being fulfilled that Christ offers. This is that symbiotic relationship I mentioned last week; we give and we receive. If you aren't feeling that, then we need to rethink the way we are doing church, which leads to the second thing we need to do.

First we give our lives to God, and then we need to realize that this isn't our church. We aren't here to serve a history, an idea, or a building. No, we are here to be God's people in the world – and that is how we are the church. I was recently reading a short article about the "perfect" church, and I would like to share pieces of it with you.

Article can be found in Christian Century, Nov. 16 2004 – "How to find a church"

Don't you think we fit that church – to a degree? We have struggles, we have dreamers, we are trying to love and trust each other. That is the presence, the time that we need – your dreams, your ideals, and your passion. We aren't serving a building; we are ministering with God through Christ!

So are you ready to give all that you have, all that you are? Are you ready to give yourself to Christ and the church – If so; are you ready to receive as well?

In participating with the church, you will find that you are participating with God. Through the church we can connect with God and participate with God in the most divine way. It

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is like you are a musician, and you hear a divine song in the air. The only way to join the song is to sit down with an orchestra and take part in the symphony, as you are able. Solos are distracting and obstructive. But the community of Christians together makes beautiful and powerful music, which the divine composer has given to us. This is the *more excellent thing* that we are to strive for which ends the passage read for today. Can you guess what that more excellent thing is – love. This passage in Corinthians moves right into the famous passage about love, and describes how all actions in love are those greatest actions, which we can perform. This is what we are called to strive for in all that we do in the church, as Christians – to strive for the love of God, the love from Christ, and the love to other people. When we act in and out of love we will find that we are acting with and through the will of God.

Thus we are not called to give time, but to realize our calling as Christians in the church. We are to be a people called by God, not tired, but full of the Holy Spirit; not beaten, but convinced of the victory of Christ; not worn out, but filled up with the knowledge that Christ loves us and forgives us for what we do. We are to be a people not gathered to be served but to serve our God in the way we are called. So this means you need to take a moment, and listen to the scripture, and then look at yourself. First come and join the body of Christ. Come to a place where you can feel, you can know, and you can live the life, the love, and the freedom of Christ. Say, “Yes” to God, and proclaim to the world your love for Christ and acceptance of him as Lord and Savior. Then be what God has called you to be. This is what I ask of all of you. Some of you are called to be prophets, some of you are called to be teachers, some of you are called to heal,

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and some are called to keep the books and other things in order. Some of you are called to lead, some of you are called to bring the presence of the Holy Spirit to the fore, to the here and now. Some are called to sing, some are called to serve. Some are called to create a space for worship and ministry; some are called to lead in that space. Some are called to clean floors, and fix buildings, some are called to watch children, some are called to pray and some are called to read. We will disagree on things from time to time, we will see things differently from time to time, but if we remember to hold to the more excellent thing, if we remember to keep our eyes on the cross then we can maintain the binds of this church, and this church will be the community that it has been called to be. And let me make this clear, all of you are called to the church, to be a part of the body of Christ – God loves you and wants you to join the gathered people in singing praise, spreading the gospel, and loving people. So, let me offer the invitation – come and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Know that without Jesus, life is not being lived to the fullest, and you will always have that hunger. Lay down your life for Christ, and you will live. And then live your whole life through this gathered group of people, this body of Christ. For if you strive to be the Christian that you are called to be here, then when you leave the safety of this place, you will be able to continue your calling as a Christian in the world. Will you give your presence, yourself, all that you have to the Church, to Christ? Will you commit to following Jesus with the gathered people? Will you give yourself to Christ?

AMEN

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