

“Sharing the Gift of Time”
preached by Rev. Elizabeth Macdonald
on Sunday, October 29, 2006
Living Stones Stewardship Campaign II – Third Sunday

Biblical Texts: Isaiah 25:6-9, Luke 12:18-21

Did you enjoy that extra hour we had between last night and this morning? Wasn't it great to get an extra hour's sleep without having to go to bed early! Wasn't it great to be able to party a little longer and still get up at the regular time this morning! And even if you didn't realize it was time to turn your clocks back until this morning, wasn't it great to be able to relax and enjoy another cup of tea and still have more time than you thought you had before heading off to church!

We may feel a little differently later today as the sun sets at 5:14 and night descends a lot faster and sooner than we expected. But right now, that extra hour is such a gift!

These days it's hard to think of time as a gift. There are so many things to do. There are too many things to do. And not enough time to do it all. Sound familiar? How did this happen? How did our lives become so filled with options and obligations that there never is enough time?

I am especially troubled by these questions because I am part of the generation that was going to “do time” differently. When I entered the paid workforce in the mid-1970's, I was one of those young women who fully expected to work outside the home throughout our adult life so that we could be more independent and self-sufficient and contribute to family financial security. Meanwhile the young men in our lives were learning how to make supper and clean toilets. They were determined that they would never “babysit” their children, as if they were occasional paid help. No way! They were going to raise their children.

It was a glorious dream – women and men sharing the child caring, house-keeping and bill paying. And technology was going to make everybody more productive in the workplace and in the home, so that there would be more leisure time to share with family and friends, to engage in hobbies and recreational activities, to participate in church and community life. We were going to live a healthy, balanced life. Many of us took this dream to heart and beginning our adult lives trying to put the pieces of this dream into practice.

So what happened? How did the dream of 30 years ago turn into what feels more and more like a nightmare today? Is it because of the development of computers and the information revolution? The growth of consumerism and the global market economy? The skyrocketing cost and increasingly organized nature of leisure and recreational activities? There is a lot of speculation and debate about how the dream got derailed. Whatever the reasons that got us to where we are today, many of us feel anxious, guilty or resentful about how we are spending our time. When we are at work, we worry about what's happening with family or friends. When we are with family or friends, we worry about what is not getting done at work. As for involvement in church or the wider community, we keep trying to squeeze that in around the edges – if and when we have any strength or energy left!

As if all this weren't enough, two terrible time-related inequities have become more pronounced in recent years. Some people's time is valued far more, exponentially more than other people's time. I will never forget the phone call I received one day while serving at Richmond Hill United Church. Someone who didn't go to our church wanted to know if I knew anybody in the congregation who was looking for homecare type work and might be available to come into their home to care for an elderly parent for 10-12 hours a day, 5 days a week.

The caller identified themselves as a Senior Executive at a large bank on Bay Street. We didn't discuss their income, but I think it is safe to say they were earning in the high 6 digit range, perhaps, with bonuses over a million dollars a year. When I asked about the terms of employment, this person said they were prepared to pay \$100 a day, barely minimum wage for a 10-12 hour day. When I asked about bus fare, the person shot back, "I can't afford to pay bus fare – that would cost too much!" That was 15 years ago. The gap between how the time of some people is valued, compared to the time of other people has grown much wider since then.

Another time-related inequity is has to do with busyness. Our culture values hyperactivity and multi-tasking. Hectic days that are full of doing are valued much more than quiet days of solitude and simply being. The tendency and temptation to value doing more than being becomes increasingly problematic for healthy, energetic people who lose the capacity to take a break or to be still, and can create a crisis for people when health or life circumstances change in ways that limit their ability to "do".

These time-related inequities are not entirely new. Luke tells us that Jesus spoke to them. We can hear that in this morning's parable. The rich man seems to embody both inequities as he acts in an utterly selfish way which proves to be unbalanced, unhealthy and unfaithful! Not only is the rich man obsessed with hoarding wealth with no evidence of acknowledgement of God as source or gratitude for God's generosity. The rich man spends all his time in frantic, ultimately pointless effort with no evidence or recognition or appreciation of time as gift to be shared with others for the benefit of the common good.

Time-related inequities evident in the parable and in our own lives are destructive and demonic. They need to be dismantled!

Dorothy Bass is convinced that we will be able to do that only when we reclaim the spiritual dimension of time. As a professor long concerned about and involved in faith formation and the writer of *Receiving the Day – Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*, she contends *People pressed for time may think what they really need is a book on time management. While honouring the help to be found in some time management techniques, I want to help people see that our predicament is more complex, our yearning deeper, and the shape of time in our lies of greater importance than such techniques can address. We need to learn a richer language than the language of time management. We need to develop life patterns that get us through our days not only with greater efficiency, but all with greater authenticity as human beings created in the image of God. (p.xiii)*

We reclaim the spiritual dimension of time as we acknowledge time as gift from God, and as we choose to share this gift of time in accordance with God's will and vision. A strikingly similar conviction about our material wealth is the foundation for our Living Stones II Stewardship Campaign, now entering its third week.

God created all that is and generously gives us every gift we have and are. God calls us into relationship, to make our world the better place God intended. We honour God when we celebrate the extravagant abundance of god's love of us and respond in gratitude. (p5 – Celebrate Stewardship)

Months ago, while preparing for this campaign, your Stewardship Committee realized that just as important as the gift of money you offer to support the church's ministry and mission, sometimes even more important is your gift of time! The committee decided to include time in this year's Living Stones Campaign. In addition to thinking about how much money you plan to contribute in 2007, you are also invited to think about how much time you plan to contribute.

In terms of your financial contribution, there are choices available to you. For example, you can contribute to the Operating Fund to keep the church going in the here and now; you can contribute to the Endowment Fund, an investment in the church's future; you can contribute to the Benevolent Fund in support of the Tuesday Morning Food Voucher Programme.

In a similar way there are choices available to you in terms of you share your gift of time. You can share time with God engaging in prayer and praise; you can share time with other church folk engaging in ministry within this community of faith; you can share time with those in need, those on the margins, those God calls us all to stand with and care for engaging in the mission of the church.

This morning we have the opportunity to share our gift of time in all three ways! We have the opportunity to encounter God and experience divine presence during this time of worship – being in this sanctuary, listening to the choir's music, joining in hymns and prayers, pondering the Word of God as revealed in and through scripture. We have the opportunity to connect and catch up with one another, to nurture particular relationships and deepen community.

After worship we are all invited to eat lunch together and hear Marylil, Bruce and Linda share their experiences of Los Quinchos – a remarkable school in Managua, Nicaragua for disadvantaged children forced to work at a very young age and denied the opportunity for education until Los Quinchos opened with the support of the United Church of Canada as well as other ecumenical and community partners. We here at Sydenham Street are being invited to participate in the Extra Measures Initiative that Kingston Presbytery has adopted – to raise \$28,000 to fund the school's lunch program for its 1000 students, as well as supply medicine and school supplies.

The need is real and urgent. The school has run out of money to fund the lunch programme, and so school officials contacted our General Council Office, asking for immediate funding. Trusting the commitment that Kingston Presbytery has made in taking on this Extra Measure, counting on the generosity of people like you and I, our church has forwarded the school \$6,000.

We are being invited to learn more about Los Quinchos, to support these children with financial gifts, to hold them in prayer, and who knows, we may even discern to share with them a gift of our time. The time we can offer and share today will make a difference!

What gift of time are we able and willing to offer in 2007 in support of the spiritual nurture, ministry and mission of Sydenham Street United Church? This is what the Living Stones Stewardship Committee is asking us to consider today and to respond to two weeks from today on November 12th, Celebration Sunday, when we will be invited to fill out an Estimate of Givings Form for 2007. This year there will be space to indicate the gift of time you intend to give, as well as the gift of money.

Last week I spoke to a class at Queen's Theological College about Pastoral Care from a working congregational minister's point of view. I began my talk with a poem written by Tom Gordon, chaplain at Marie Curie Hospice in Edinburgh. It captures in a poignant way what I think many people in hospital or nursing homes are longing for when a minister like me comes for to visit.

As I heard myself reading these words in that class, it struck me that the longing expressed in the poem is not unique to those who are ill or elderly. We all share that yearning, that deep desire to share time with others – we bring that longing to worship on Sunday morning. We bring that longing to meetings and activities we attend.

I would like to read Tom Gordon's poem to you now, and as I do, ask you to think about the people you connect with here at Sydenham Street – not just Sunday morning, not just church people – think about all the people you connect with. Hear their voices speaking through my voice. Hear your voice speaking to them.

*You come to me, and sit and listen.
I like that. I like your company, you interest, your ready smile.
It breaks my day, fills my time.
You come to me, and give me time,
and make me feel I matter again.*

*But do you know, can you ever understand
that what you see of me, and what you know of me
and what you learn of me
is not the me I am, the me I know I am
but just part of me that's here and now?*

*Do you know, can I make you understand
that what you see and like, it seems –
is but the most recent page in the album of my life?
Because, you see, you have started at the last page.
For that's where the album of my life lay open when you came along,
open there for you to gaze upon.*

*I am glad you like that page.
But do you know, can I make you understand
that this is not it all?
There's more than this to see and know and learn about.*

*So, take some time to turn the pages of the album of my life.
Gaze upon the images you didn't know were there and look and learn.*

*. . . Enough for now?
Perhaps . . . for now.
So go, and come again another day
and take your time with me to leaf the pages through.
you will see m there, with smiles and tears
so slim, too fat, alone, with friends. . .
You'll see and understand that this and this and this and this . . .
is me.*

*Not simply now, not just this part, not simply this most recent page.
There's more I need to show if you can time the time with me.
The album of my life just waiting to be opened again –
If you have the time to spare.
If you have the time to share.*

(p.147 Holy Ground, Liturgies and worship Resources for An Engaged Spirituality)

It's what we long for. It's what we need. It's what we could and should be talking about with each other – encouraging and supporting each other. It's God's hope and will for us! Sharing the gift of time!