
Time: An Ever-Rolling Stream

A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh
Advent 1 – Year A

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.

During the election season Margaret Ann and I would sit in front of the television and go from one news station to the next. That was our evening entertainment. So, when the election concluded we started fighting over what to watch on television.

I work weekends, which means I have hours of unwatched football on the DVR. So, I suggested we watch reruns of college football games. However, that only entertains one of us. Margaret Ann has a number shows she enjoys watching, but none of them really entertain me.

So, we decided to compromise and watch the newest thing on Netflix, “The Crown.” For those of you who don’t know, The Crown is a new television series based upon the life of Queen Elizabeth II.

In one of the first episodes there is a powerful scene. I would go so far as to say it is an Advent scene.

The Royal Family is at one of their country palaces for Christmas, when a group of carolers comes to visit King George. They process into the parlor where the Royal Family is sitting and a young girl approaches King George and hands him a gift.

Inside the box is a large paper crown made by the children. The king places it on his head and his family begins to laugh. Then the king stands up, walks over to the young girl and proceeds to join them in singing the last verse of “In the Bleak Midwinter.”

King George has told no one that he is dying of lung cancer. So, when he starts singing he looks out upon his family and begins to cry. The image of King George singing with tears coming down his face is a powerful Advent scene, because it reveals the importance of time.

King George cries because he knows there isn’t much time left. It is the last Christmas that he celebrates with his family. But, King George is also crying because he realizes time has gotten away from him. He looks at his adult children and starts thinking about all the events and memories he has missed.

We have all experienced something like this. We have looked at our children or grandchildren and said to ourselves, where has time gone? After the birth of our second child, someone told us, “the days would be long, but the years would go by fast.”

As we were driving back from Thanksgiving with two screaming children (one of those long days), I told Margaret Ann that tomorrow will mark my fifth anniversary here at the Cathedral. Where has time gone?

In just a few days we will start getting those beautiful Christmas cards in the mail. If you are like me, you will open a card, look at the picture of the family and say, “Wow, when did those children grow up?” Or, you will look at your classmate and

say, “Wow, when did they get to looking so old?” The image of time flying by can bring you to tears.

And then there are the moments we are brought to tears because time has ended for someone we love. Yes, when a loved one dies we mourn their absence, but we also mourn the times we weren’t able to spend with that person.

One of my favorite funeral hymns is “O God Our Help In Ages Past.” The hymn names the grief we experience over lost time. Verse 5 goes like this: “Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all our years away; they fly, forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day.”

Time is an ever-rolling stream that seems to get away.

If you have been an Episcopalian for a while, you have probably noticed that many of our Advent lessons are about the end of time. That is because time is an important theme in this holy season.

Advent is about preparing for the birth of Christ, and if you have ever prepared for a birth, you know that time is of the essence.

In the Bible there are two words for time: The first is a Greek word “chronos,” which means chronological time. If you have one of those Ironmen/women watches you will see that the stop watch is actually titled Chronos.

The second word for time is “kairos,” and it means God’s time. It is actually the word used in today’s passage from Romans: “You know what time it is.” Kairos has to do with an awareness of the holy and sacred time.

As Christians, we live in a world of chronos and kairos, a world where time is extremely important.

The challenge you and I face is that we are living in a 24/7 world.

Last year, David Allen had to republish his best-selling book, “The Art of Getting Things Done.” Why? Because between 2001 and 2015 our lives became flooded with technology. The average working person now receives around 150 emails a day.

You have so much coming your way, you can barely get through chronos (the daily demands), leaving you little or no time for kairos (those holy moments).

At my former parish we offered The Dave Ramsey Financial Peace Course. In one of his lectures, Dave Ramsey said, “You can let money control you (by not creating a budget), or you can control your money (by budgeting it).”

I think the same thing can be said about time: Most of us lose control of time and never seem to have enough of it.

Imagine what our lives would be like if on this first Sunday of Advent, we used this holy season as a way to focus on the importance of time.

Imagine if we took the themes of Advent and applied them to the way we structure our lives.

Advent offers us two important themes when it comes to allocating time. Here are those two themes: 1. Have a Vision, and 2. Create Space.

1. Have A Vision. Throughout Advent we are going to hear readings from the prophets. The prophets write during difficult times, yet they are able to articulate a holy and hopeful vision.

It is a reminder that we need a vision for the lives we long to live. We need a vision for what a holy relationship and quality time look like or we will never experience it. It starts with having a vision.

2. Create Space. Throughout Advent we will be reminded that an unmarried young girl said “yes” to God. We are reminded that this young girl created space in her life (and in her body) for God.

One of my favorite prayers in the BCP is the collect for the fourth Sunday of Advent.

It is a prayer about God’s daily visitation to us, and reminder that we are to be like Mary and create a space for God. We

have to recognize the holy moments, the holy people, and the holy events and say, “yes” to them. We need to create space.

I imagine that if we had a clear vision and were able to create space in our lives, we would be able to tackle the demands and busyness of this season, while also experiencing the holy moments of life.

You know, those holy moments that bring tears to our eyes! Those moments that make life special. Those are the moments where we believe “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

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