

How We Live: Spending Time, Using Talent

Luke 11:3-48

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I wonder if you enjoy the “My Turn” columns in Newsweek magazine as much as I do. These are always written by different people, mostly people who are not famous, even though they may be professional writers. There is almost always an interesting point of view expressed. And so it was with “A Life Lesson Learned at the *Stop and Shop*”. This was a life lesson about time, and the spending of it.

Have you ever thought about how we automatically say “spending time”? Time is a commodity, just like money.

The author of this particular piece, Jeffrey Blout, lives in Stoneham, Massachusetts, where apparently time is at even more of a premium than it is here in Dallas. He tells his story of a thwarted trip to the *Stop and Shop*. Here’s how he begins:

“It’s about noon on a Wednesday; I’ve got plenty to do, but I need to pick up a few things at the grocery store first. I have determined that it will take 30 minutes to complete the errand. I pride myself on efficiency, and will do everything in my power to meet my goal.”

Anybody else like this? Now this is the part I really want you to pay attention to.

“YOU SEE, I LIVE WITH THIS ABSURD NOTION THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR ME TO ‘OWN’ MY TIME.”¹ [emphasis mine]

This is a profound statement and it’s all the more amazing because Jeffrey looks like he’s 35 years old. A wise young man.

We all live with the absurd (and egocentric) notion that our time is OURS. That our time **belongs** to us. And most of us feel entitled to a certain amount of time. A certain number of years. And, funny thing, it’s usually longer than the average 78.3 years of life expectancy on the actuarial charts. We function as

¹ Jeffrey A. Blout, “A Life Lesson Learned at the Stop and Shop”, Newsweek, October 15, 2007. P. 18.

though we believe we have all the time in the world. We also live with the absurd notion that we are going to get it!

I wonder if at least at some level this is why most of the gospel we heard today is never included in our list of assigned scripture readings. It is part of the offensive gospel, the part that we all want to tone down somehow, rework, or, if all else fails, simply skip over.

Because we've heard it more than once, and because it's a good story, we may remember the one about the servants waiting for the man of the mansion to come back, all the lights on, continually peering out the front door window looking to see if that huge Hummer has pulled into the circle drive. How Mr. Big rewards them, and even (strange as it seems!) sits them down and brings out his best pinot noir for them, once he gets back. He serves them. He rewards them.

But the rest of this gospel is probably less familiar because you don't hear it in church on a regular basis. Peter sidles up to Jesus and wonders, "Hey brother, are you talking to us?" "Are you talking to me?" And in so many words, Jesus says, "Well, you betcha!" and he proceeds to talk to the disciples about the greater demands placed on them. There are higher expectations placed on them because they are in the know. There are higher expectations on them because they are aware of what's at stake. They are walking right there with Jesus. They have no excuses. The stakes are high. In this gospel, they're life and death.

When I was a senior in high school my father wrote me a letter, which I have to this very day. I was a pretty successful student, and my father was acknowledging it. But as he often did, he was also using the opportunity to teach me something. I will never forget a phrase in his letter, "to whom much is given, much will be expected." I didn't know at the time this came from the gospel of Luke, but those words burned in my brain.

These words appear ONLY in the gospel of Luke, and they should be burning in all our brains right about now. Great gifts mean great responsibilities. Greater gifts, greater responsibilities. There is not a person here who has not been gifted with time and talent and opportunity. Not a single one.

Several years ago I was having a conversation with Tim Kubatzsky, an acquaintance who at the time also happened to be Vice President of Institutional Advancement at Austin Seminary (aka "chief fundraiser"). We were talking about the challenges of his job. Tim is an easygoing sort of guy, though he's very good at what he does. This is what he said, "Oh, my job? My job is easy. Now you pastors, your job is tough. I'm just asking people for their money; you pastors ask for everything. Pastors ask people to give their lives."

Giving our lives to be the hands and feet of Christ on earth means giving the precious time and the many talents God has given us.

This all-encompassing cost of discipleship was described a long time ago in a statement by Joseph Cardinal Mercier, a Belgian priest and scholar. He said, "We must not only give what we have; we must give **what we are.**" Oh, that is hard. Giving what we are.

This gospel reading is about the end times. The time of judgment. The end of the world. We may well feel we are nearing the end times, and who knows? Maybe we are. It still matters how we live 'til then. How we live should be giving time and sharing talent.

When we think about the work of the church here at Lake Highlands, the stakes are high. We are at a crossroads. We can move forward into the future God has planned for us, or we can fade into the past. Lots of us are banking on the future. To move in that direction, we need all hands on deck. We need everyone giving time, everyone sharing talent, everyone growing in the discipleship and the joy comes only from giving.

And we cannot afford to hear the words, "Been there, done that. Me? I am too old/too young/too tired/too busy." Everyone can pray, everyone. And everyone here must pray and pray fervently for the fantastic future God has planned for this congregation.

There is a niche and a need for everyone, from the most senior to the youngest. Seniors can make phone calls; some can visit, write cards, check up on others. There are ways to serve even for the infirm and homebound. Youth can work a garage sale/usher/create things. And you who are in between, I know you have abilities and gifts and energy for things that haven't even begun to be tapped! Over the coming months leaders of the congregation will be calling on you as never before to step forward, share your passion, spend your time, give your gifts for the glory of God in this place.

What you will find is energy. What you will find is joy. What you will find is something you will not find anywhere else. What you will find is blessing. What you will find is God.

This year for the first time in a long time we include a commitment of time/talent in your stewardship packet. This is the **most important piece of paper** in that packet. It's blue. And each of you, even the youth, even the kids, are urged to read it carefully, consider what you can do for the ministry of LHPC. And then FILL IT OUT and turn it in. If you have an idea that's not on there, write it down. If you want to do something different than what's on the form, write it down. Write it down and turn it in on or before November 9th.

We've been hearing the phrase "at the end of the day" a lot these days. Especially during these times of economic turmoil, unrest of partisan politics, chaos of world clashes, we should be thinking about the "end of the day". Because at the end of the day each one of us will be asked, "how did you spend the time I gave you? How did you share the talents and skills I gifted you?" At the end of the day, (and that day will come, for each one of us) we will see things as they are. I hope we will all be seated at that great dining table and given a glass of pinot noir.