

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO TIME?

Recently I attended a meeting of the Wissahickon Faith Community Association, a gathering of local clergy and others who meet monthly. For most of the past two years we have had only virtual meetings. But on Thursday we met over at Boehm's United Church of Christ on Penllyn Pike for some lunch and sharing and discussion. During lunch, while catching up on what has been happening or not happening in various congregations, we were talking about changes that people were making in their lives, including how they worship. Live streaming has helped people stay connected over the past two years. But the downside is that many have grown accustomed to worshipping without leaving the comfy homestead. Worshipping in bed clothes while wearing bunny slippers.

An unanticipated benefit to Livestreaming is the ability to save and store the recording and post it on a church's website. This enables people to go at any time of the day Sunday and participate virtually. No longer are you bound to get up in time to attend the 9:00 AM service. This realization led to a discussion about what has been happening, especially in first world countries, with our understanding of time. Once upon a time, back in more agrarian days the day was ordered and scheduled with the rising and setting of the sun. Arise, get some breakfast, go to work or school, break for lunch and a bit of relaxation, return to work or school until through much of the afternoon and then head home for dinner and relaxation or some homework or house chores after dinner. We did this every day, five days a week, except in summertime.

The morning paper told you what had happened the day before. At night the local news came on at five or so and then the national and international news at six. Our favorite shows came on a specific day and at a specific time. The next day everyone would discuss what had been watched the night before. It was all part of the ordered pattern of life. But about a dozen years ago something happened. With the onset of recording devices and with the onset of Cable television, and all-day cable news. No longer was news a nighttime thing. It was now an instantaneous thing. Not only news. Everything became accessible in this instant. Even our favorite shows. Even sports could be recorded and watched, without commercials, at a different time. We were no longer limited by the chronology of time. We could do what we wanted when we wanted.

And we have done so. But there have been consequences to this. Besides being able to binge our favorite shows, we can work online too—at various times so long as we get our work done. We do have to connect with fellow workers but it is certainly not the same as it was when we worked in an office together. The linear or chronological dimension has been broken. Now each person can decide what they want to do and when they want to do it. Time has been broken free. There is more freedom and more confusion too. A bit more chaos. More depends on each individual now to organize and structure their day, their family life, their worship. It is not so much a shared community experience anymore. It is

very much an individual thing. I do not believe we have grasped just how different this is and where we will ultimately land.

This breaking of time has affected our praying. I have a very structured prayer routine. It has served me well throughout my life. But with the uncoupling of routine from our day and from our family life goes the uncoupling of our prayer lives. We have not yet found the best way to rework this. Many no longer come to Mass. Do I have to pray with others? Isn't it enough for me to just pray? A real question. But are we beginning to sense that something is missing? Perhaps we sense that but cannot yet name precisely what is missing. I submit the very human thing of "being with others" of human community is what is missing. AND. The very real gathering with others who believe to share our faith and our convictions not just as individuals but as members of a community, members of the Body of Christ. What is missing is the worship, together with other believers, of the living God. And entering into communion, personally but communally as well. And some have let prayer slip from their lives. They used to pray but it has gotten away from them recently. There will be an affect to this even if not grasped immediately.

Today's gospel reading is a story about a woman who so pesters an unjust judge that he actually gives her a correct judgment in her case because he is afraid that she will attack him if he doesn't. Jesus does not condone what the judge does but calls attention to the perseverance, persistence and tenacity of the woman. Jesus applies this kind of attitude to the whole reality of prayer. Do not give up praying. Do not stop praying. What difference does it make we ask? It makes all the difference in the world. And who says this? Why Jesus himself. The One who comes from God and leads us into the Kingdom of God. It is this Jesus who not only taught us how to pray but commends us to pray daily and to ask for daily bread.

My friends we are no longer battling the Amalekites like Moses and Joshua and the Israelites were 3200 years ago. But there is still a spiritual warfare underway for each person's life and soul. Prayer gives us access to the power we need to journey through this world safely and with purpose. Prayer is necessary. Prayer matters because prayer is connection. It is connection with God. And that matters. It is communion. Communion with God. And that matters. It is communion with each other. And that matters too. My friends, we will weather this time breakage. But in the meantime we are invited by the Lord not to give up on our prayer. It is vitally necessary and it makes all the difference in the world.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.