



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

April 7, 2019

**Does Anybody Really Know
What Time It Is?**

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

© 2019 by Dr. Bruce Lancaster and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: April 9, 2019

Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?

Psalm 90:1-4, 12

Luke 2:1-6

I want to begin by saying what a privilege it is to be in this pulpit, knowing what I do of the history of this church; its reputation for ministry and mission, for its leadership and service to the community, to our denomination, and into the world.

I am here to serve as your interim pastor, or as some have begun to identify this particular kind of ministry as a ministry of transitions as churches move from one chapter in their history to another.

As in the case of this congregation, for nearly 75 years and all the ministers who have served here; I consider it an honor to serve as that bridge of ministry to the minister who will build on that rich tradition.

Let me get one thing out of the way right now.

There will come a time during the search process when someone will come up and ask me, “How much longer until we get our real minister?”

Well, for one thing, I am a “real” minister! But I do understand; time is on everybody's mind when it comes to seeking a new pastor.

I will tell you this now, as the Pastor Nominating Committee begins its work, I will remind them: ***Success is not measured by how quickly a minister is called; success is measured by how the time is well spent in calling the minister God has chosen.***

I'll say that again: Success is not measured by how quickly a minister is called; success is measured by how the time is well spent in calling the minister God has chosen.

It is all about time, and I know that one of the questions you probably have is: "What time are we going to get out today?"

One church I served put a clock in the balcony because of a long-winded preacher.

The problem, they said, was once they put the clock up there, the minister never looked at the balcony again!

But it's more than just what time worship ends.

Time is ever an issue with us. My own ministry with you is about the in-between time.

And how many of us talk about not having enough time, trying to save time or find the time, where did the time go?, been waiting a long time, time's running out, or as the old hymn says, "time like an ever flowing stream soon bears us all away": life is time.

And, yes, the question of the sermon comes from the song by the old rock group Chicago.

I show my age, but I got to hear them at the New Orleans Rock Festival two weeks after the Woodstock festival when they sang their hit song, "Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?"

But long before Chicago had a hit song with it, it's the question that Luke is underlining in our gospel lesson. Yes, we know of this passage as the opening lines of the

Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?

Christmas story, a passage relegated to one time a year for one particular story.

But for Luke, he is emphasizing to his readers that the whole story they are about to hear, not just this one night, but the full gospel message of which he is writing is about a real person, Jesus, living in the real world in real time.

This is not some ‘once upon a time’ story.

If Luke were writing today, our scripture would read: This is the time of the 3rd year of President Donald Trump, when Tom Wolf is Governor and Matthew Serakowski is Township Manager.

It means for us that the full story of Luke’s gospel message is just as real for us: real people in a real world in real time.

Remember that the first act of creation was the creation of time, the first day.

In our reading from Psalm 90, which is listed as a “Prayer of Moses”, Moses picks up that creation story and speaks for us when he says: ***Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.***

What Luke does for the rest of his gospel and into his Acts of the Apostles, he challenges us to live out the answer to Moses’ prayer: to count our days, to make our days count.

Luke is affirming in our passage that all of life is time that matters as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

That’s the answer to the question, “Do you really know what time it is?”

Which leads to the second question from that Chicago song: Not only “Does anybody really know what time it is?” But also, “Does anybody really care?”

We all get so caught up in time, but does anybody really care enough...do you really care about the time God has for you to spend your time caring about what God cares about?

Think about it this way: when you want to know what time it is, what do you look at? Tap the watch on your wrist, the clock on the microwave? A traditional clock on the wall?

Is it digital or does it have a face?

If it's digital it answers the question, “This is what time it is!” But this factual, digital time is symbolic of how we too often count our days.

Moment to moment to moment, scheduled beyond sanity... just trying to keep up with what time it is.

But telling time using a clock with a face, like this watch, it does answer the question as to what time it is...and more. For the way we tell time can be: 11:26 or 15 minutes ‘til, or half past.

It's the face of time that allows us to see the present, but also acknowledge the past and look into the future, all at the same time.

Paul described that face of time this way in his letter to the Ephesians: *God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time...*”

Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?

The fullness of time: not just what time it is, not just to teach us to count our days, but to care about time is as we live in the holiness of time which reveals the awesome power, purpose, and presence of God.

And let's be clear, this fullness of time includes good times and bad times, be it violent assaults against our world, personal betrayals that cut deep, difficult diagnoses which turn our lives upside down.

Even then, we can embrace the holiness of our times, to be strengthened as in this prayer of St. Brendan: *I will trust in the darkness and know that my times, even now, are in Your hand.*

I've spent time with people in their last days, and I can tell you, not one has talked about job or house or money or anything like that.

What they've talked about is how much they were loved and how much they loved others, the times of their life that mattered.

Many years ago, a man came to my office and told me about his 16-year-old granddaughter.

She had just come home from rehab, not for drugs or alcohol, but from a nervous breakdown; the stress of school and activities and the social pressures had gotten to her. He and his wife had just come home that weekend from seeing her, about a two-hour drive.

She had stayed in her room for most of their visit. Her parents said she was very tired, very sad.

But just before they left, she came downstairs and asked if he would walk with her down the driveway.

He said, “We walked to the end, a slow walk, I talked some, she didn’t say anything, just held onto my arm, about 100 yards there and back. And when we got in, she went back up to her room.”

“Bruce,” he said, “Soon after we got to our house, the phone rang, and it was my son, asking what had happened on that walk, what we had talked about.

“I told him, ‘nothing, what’s wrong?’ He said, ‘that’s just it, nothing’s wrong, it’s just that when we went up to her room after you left, she was smiling, the first time we’ve seen her smile in 6 months. And we know it’s going to be OK.”

And as the tears began to slide down his cheeks, he said, “I crashed my airplane over Holland in WWII and spent six weeks hiding from the Nazis before I made it safely back to England.

I’ve survived two heart attacks and a triple bypass. I’ve been in car wrecks, other accidents, but do you think...Do you think that God kept me alive through all of that just to make that walk that day?”

Yes, of course, all those days, all of that to experience the holiness of time in that walk.

So it is for you and for me, for this day, for all the days God has for us: Time to know the presence of God, to live as the people of God, to fulfill God’s purpose in the time we have for the walk we are on.

Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?

To care about the time we have as we live the reality of Jesus Christ in the here and now.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630

www.westminster-church.org