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May 31, 2009

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Living in the Present

Matthew 6: 34

When is the best time to do something?

Who is the most important person with whom to work?

What is the most important thing to be doing at all times?

The story is told of a Russian emperor who was so consumed with finding an answer to these three questions that after consulting learned advisors and academicians and finding no answer that satisfied him, he decided to take a long journey to meet an esteemed hermit, an old holy man who lived up in the mountains.

Attendants traveled with him to the base of a mountain, but he left them there while he continued on his way. Desiring not to overawe the hermit, the emperor changed into the working clothes of a common man.

He reached the hermit only to find the old man working in his garden, preparing seed beds in front of his hut. The old man's labor and fatigue were evident with each thrust of the spade, but the impatient emperor was determined to have answers to his questions:

"Sir, What is the most important time to do something?

Who is the most important person with whom to work?

What is the most important thing to be doing?"

The old man said nothing, but patted the emperor on the arm kindly and continued working.

The emperor eyes were suddenly opened and he said, "Sir, you are old and tired, let me do that for you." With relief the old man let him. The emperor prepared the seed bed and after an hour of working asked again, "Can you answer my questions now?"

The hermit said, "I am rested now; I can work," but the emperor kept digging in the garden for another hour, then another. To his surprise he found it was now late in the day. Finally he said, "Sir, if you do not know the answers to my questions, tell me so I can return to my home."

"Listen," said the hermit, "do you not hear someone running our way?"

Suddenly, a man came running into view, holding his stomach, collapsing at their feet.

The emperor discovered that the man had been stabbed, and he took off his own shirt to staunch the blood. The emperor continued to bind and rebind the wound until finally the blood stopped.

It was night now, and the air was cold. The emperor and the hermit carried the wounded man into the hut. Exhausted from all his labors the emperor fell asleep on the hermit's floor.

When he awakened the next day the emperor was surprised to see the wounded man looking at him.

"Forgive me," the man whispered. "Forgive you?" asked the emperor. "What have you done?"

"You do not know me", said the man, "but I know you.

I am your sworn enemy because you killed my brother and took my property.

I heard that you were coming to see the hermit, so I lay in wait to kill you.

But when you didn't come down the mountain I left my ambush to find you and found your attendants instead who recognized and wounded me.

I would have died had it not been for your aid.

Now I am grateful and ashamed, and if I live I will be your servant the rest of my days."

Amazed that he had turned an enemy into a friend with a single act of kindness the emperor forgave the man and restored to him his confiscated property and promised to assign his own royal physician to bring the man back to health.

The emperor went outside the hut to find the hermit planting seeds in the bed they had prepared.

“Do you have my answers now?” he asked. “

You already have your answers,” the holy man replied.

“If you had not taken pity on my fatigue and aided me, you would have been attacked by that man on your descent. The most important time in your life was the time you were digging in the seed bed, the most important person was me, and the most important pursuit was taking pity on my age.

Then the wounded man came up, and the most important time was spent dressing his wound; he was the most important person with whom to work, and caring for him was the most important deed.

So here are your answers:

the most important time is the present; it is only moment we have dominion over;

the most important person is the person who is right before you -- who knows if you will have dealings with another?

the most important pursuit is acting in love toward the person before you, transforming them by your graciousness.”

Louisville basketball coach Rick Pitino consistently preaches to his kids:

“Live in the present!” Focus on the present moment, he tells them, and don’t spend too much time worrying about how a win or loss will impact your future.

Live in the present and enjoy the present moment.

Whether Coach Pitino knows it or not, his sound advice is Biblically grounded.

Our Lord says to us quite plainly, “Take no heed about the morrow, what you will wear, what you shall eat. Your heavenly Father knows you need these things. You can trust Him to provide them.”

Immediately, our mind leaps to rejoinder, ‘But such a lifestyle would be irresponsible!

We *must* plan for the future, we *must* take heed for how to provide for ourselves and our family.’

Our Lord would say to us, “That may be true. But how much of your life is spent fretting about things over which you have no control? How much of your energy is wasted in worry?”

Do you not spend more time fretting over your food and clothing and housing in the future than you do enjoying these matters in the present? Trust God to provide for you -- live in the present!

When our Lord gathers his disciples around his table and says, “This is my body which is broken for you; this is my blood, which is shed for you” – he is really saying to us at the most profound level,

“God will provide for you. *Trust God to provide for you.*”

Ultimately, God will do whatever is necessary to redeem your life,

offering the most costly gift of love imaginable to establish communion with you.

The Supper is God’s reminder that the divine love ultimately provides for us all that we really need.

We are freed from worry about the future;

we are freed by God to live in the present and make the most of it.

The most important time is the present – it is the only time we have dominion over.

The most important person is the person right in front of you –

who knows if you will meet another just as needy?

The most important thing to be doing is offering your love to meet the need of the moment, so that in so doing your act of grace in the present might transform the face of the future.

Here is the moment: our Lord says, ‘Take and eat and believe. Take and drink and believe.

In so doing, remember, God loves you.’

Let us respond in this moment with acts of love and gratitude in return.

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Communion Sunday

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