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Sermon
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Park Congregational Church
Worcester, Massachusetts

“Now Is the Time”

New Year’s Sermon
Scripture Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Dear people of God, there was once a woman who was very faithful in her church attendance and in her devotion to the church. But her husband never attended. Whenever the woman’s minister would visit them, the husband would always be very friendly and tell him that someday he would get around to coming to church, but first he had to work extra hours at his job to build up some security, finish fixing up the vacation cottage, and spend time visiting his mother in the nursing home. Well, the man finally kept his promise. His wife called up the minister one day and asked if he would preside over her husband’s funeral. Yes, he finally got around to coming to church. He was brought into the church to be buried.

Many young people have the idea, like this man, that they have all the time in the world to get around to do what they want. Perhaps that’s somewhat excusable when we are young, but some middle-aged and even older people have that same attitude toward time.

But the fact of the matter is that God alone is the Master of time; we are not. On the contrary, we are for the most part the slaves of time. The clock is always ticking for us, and there is never quite enough time to do all we want.

Isn’t it true that we always seem to be running out of time? Time passes so

quickly. Deadlines are upon us before we know it. We feel that we are always under pressure and stress. If we could only find a way to stretch the moments of each day. But we cannot.

The founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates, is the richest man in the world. At one point in March of 2000 before the stock market began its slow descent downward, his net worth was valued at around \$100,000,000,000. Bill Gates was asked if there were anything in the whole wide world he still wanted. He replied very quickly and simply, "More time." Indeed, we would all like more time, wouldn't we? Time is a ruthless taskmaster.

Time certainly has a definite impact upon all of our lives. And we deal differently with time during different stages of life. When we were young, we tended to wish that time would hurry up. We were always waiting for something--for some future event to happen. It might have been a birthday, or Christmas, or getting our driver's license. Time seemed incredibly slow back then. We just couldn't wait for the time to pass for some yearningly awaited event. We were in a rush to grow up and be able to do things that adults do.

To some extent, even as adults, we still do this. But this is not really a healthy way to use our time. By wishing for some future day to arrive, we may miss the present entirely. But we still wish. We wish for the day that we graduate high school, that we get married, that we receive a promotion. We wish for the day that we can buy that new car, that new home, those season's tickets to the Red Sox or Patriots games. We wish for the day when our children will be on their own. We wish for the day when we are able to retire and finally enjoy life. These are all good

milestones, but what about today?

You see, if we're always living for some future event, then we're wasting today. If we never learn to live in the present, one day we will look back on our life and conclude that it was always being suspended, waiting for the next thing to happen.

We have begun a new year. The year 2009 AD is over. AD stands for *anno domini* in Latin, the "year of the Lord." We are now in the year 2010 AD. So what? Does it really make a difference? Every year we come to this moment with the concept of time on our minds. We feel that the passing of time compels us to think about our lives and the direction they're taking. A new year ought to cause us to make new resolutions. This is the way we think. But should we be thinking this way?

Well, all of us should certainly be thinking about time. Time is not an illusion. Each of us has only so much of it to spend. And one of the profound mysteries of time is that we don't know when our time will be up. Each of us possesses only a limited amount of time. And it's not the same for any two of us. So, we must deal with time, and deal with it effectively. How do we do that?

In thinking about time, we must first think clearly about the past. It goes without saying that the past is the past. The past cannot be changed. What we have done, we have done, and there is nothing we can do about it. Those who are able to allow the past to remain the past are wise indeed. You see, the past can bind us. It can imprison us if we are not careful.

Some people live in the past. It's in that sense that the past can enslave us. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with memories. In fact, good memories

are exceedingly valuable. But the memories of our failures and our fears, and the times we were hurt by others, these are the things that can drag us down in the present. In this important sense, we need to let the past go.

In another sense, however, the past is not dead at all. And it shouldn't be. The past is very much alive in us. The past has shaped us. It has to a large extent created the persons we have become. Because of our experiences in the past, our character has been formed, and the way we act and react to things that are said to us and done to us is determined. In this very real sense, the past remains with us every moment.

How do you view your past? Is it something that still haunts you, or is it something that helps you? Are there unresolved situations in your past that you need to deal with today? Are there persons in your past that you need to contact in order to make something right? The past is past, but it is not dead. We must deal with the past effectively if we are to live in the present happily.

In thinking about time, the next thing with which we must deal is the future. Our yesterdays are behind us. Our tomorrows are not yet here. Indeed, tomorrow never really comes. When it arrives, it is today.

One thing that we know about the future, indeed the only thing we know about the future, is that it is uncertain. There is no guarantee that we will ever see any point in what we call the future. Our lives could end at any time. There's no guarantee that we will live to 100, or 90, or 80, or 70, or 50, or even 30. James Dean died at 24. The great poets, Keats, Shelley, and Byron died at 25, 30, and 36 respectively. Mozart died at the age of 35. Princess Diana died at the age of 36. History is filled with people who met unexpected tragedy and whose lives were cut

short. I'm sure most of us know of persons who died unexpectedly at a very early age. None of us has a guarantee of tomorrow. We don't know what the future holds. But we know who holds the future.

Clutching this truth that God holds our future safely doesn't mean that we don't need to think about the future or plan for the future. Each of us must certainly think about what we intend to do and order our lives in such a way that we're able to do it. We need to consider the possibilities for the future and we should always be prepared for what the future might have in store for us. We need to think realistically about the future if we are to live productively in the present.

We should not, however, hold on to a false hope for the future. We must not have a false sense of assurance that whatever happens will happen and there is nothing we can do about it in the present. This kind of attitude lulls us into procrastination. We tend to postpone many things that we need to be doing today. That's the wrong way of looking at "tomorrow."

The Spanish word for "tomorrow" is *manana*. Many people, certainly not just those who happen to be of Spanish descent, use this word, *manana*, to put off things that they need to do today. They have a false hope that they will be able to accomplish something *manana*, when really they are just using the word as an excuse to put it off indefinitely.

Many people have this problem of trying to live in the future. They're going to do great things when they get around to it. When they have time, they're going to become more involved in things that count. They're going to write a book. They're going to travel around the world. They're going to devote more time to the church.

When “such and such” happens or after “this and that” take place, then they will do those things. They will do it later, tomorrow, next week, someday, *manana*. The fact, however, is that, just as *manana* never comes, so the time for accomplishing all these wonderful things almost never comes.

As mysterious as time is--and we will never understand it completely--one thing we need to know is that we have only today. We have only the present. This is why the apostle Paul says that “now is the acceptable time” (2 Corinthians 6:2). This is a penetrating insight that we live only in the present. The past is gone. The future never really arrives. When it does, it is the present. And some day appointed for each one of us, the future will not arrive anymore. Only today is here and now.

Now is the only time we have and it’s the only acceptable time in our relationship with God. And so, the question we must answer is, “What are we going to do with ‘now’”? How are you spending “now?” Are you living in either the past or the future? Are there things you have been putting off until tomorrow, things which you should be doing today? I know I have. Are you sitting back, thinking that some day will come the perfect time that will allow you to do what you have been putting off for so long? Well, that someday may never arrive.

This is the message that we need to hear at this time of year. We must live in the now of 2010 AD, because it’s the only time we have. Thank God for the past. Thank God for whatever future there is that awaits us. But we must live now, today, in the present, because now is the time. Amen.