

**“Time Is Short”**

1 Corinthians 7:29-35

Urgent. Merriam-Webster defines the word as “calling for immediate action”. It’s a reality we all know at just about any age, from the “gotta go now” toddler years, to the “it’s taking forever” teenage years, and on into the rest of our lives.

Urgent, it’s like that time, back in the spring of 2020. No, not that pandemic thing, but something much more joyful. It was May 2020, when my wife gave me a call. We were about 36 weeks along in our third pregnancy, and Carolyn was heading down into St. Louis for her checkup when she called and told me, “I’m pretty sure I’m in labor.” You all know how I responded to my beloved wife who had already given birth twice and was an expert: “Really?”

After being *calmly* and *clearly* reassured that this was, in fact, happening, I quickly got a babysitter for the big girls, packed a bag and headed from our place in O’Fallon to the hospital down in St. Louis. After all, when your wife calls and tells you the baby is coming, you drop everything else. The baby isn’t going to wait, the situation is urgent!

Like the time in the spring of 54, when Paul wrote to a young and growing congregation in Corinth. The situation there was urgent; urgent enough that Paul couldn’t wait for his next go round to address some issues. Instead, he wrote a letter and sent in his protégé, Timothy, to make sure thing would get taken care of as quickly as possible. In that letter we call 1 Corinthians, Paul lays out so many things which need taken care of, and very few of them are small things.

He starts out by talking about their propensity to form factions within the congregation. Then he is lead to talk about their questionable leadership choices, and how they aren’t taking care of one another. Oh, and let’s not get started on the one guy in the congregation who’s...well, like I said, let’s not get started on that. It seems like there are fires everywhere, and a million things to get going on.

The Spirit inspires Paul to see that this really boils down to an issue of priorities. So, the Spirit leads him to give the guidance he does. So, Paul writes: **“Time is short, so don’t marry. If you are married, live like you aren’t.”** These recommendations laid out here obviously get your attention, and they were meant to. There is a larger reality at play that shouldn’t be forgotten: **“Time is short.”** The situation is urgent, and the work is important. Especially for the Corinthian believers. These things needed taken care of yesterday, so they needed to get going on them ASAP.

The Spirit’s guidance to them is just as useful today as ever. **“Let those who are married live as though they weren’t.”** If that piece of advice caught your attention or caused confusion, it makes sense. Maybe, with the absolute best of intentions, you’d love the opportunity to take Paul to task on that statement. If the guidance gives some level of discomfort, it’s likely because, as much as things have changed through all the years, we haven’t changed much as people. We have a lot in common with our Corinthian brothers and sisters. We are, generally, well off. It’s a reality of our American context. We consider ourselves spiritual people, in touch with the things of God. To bring it all together, we are comfortable where things are right now. So, where’s the fire? What’s the hurry about?

Our similarity to our brothers and sisters of old doesn’t end there. We fall for the same trick that had them so ensnared, and because of it, we have lost any sense of urgency with the command our Savior gave to love one another, and to make disciples by baptizing and teaching.

Maybe that's because we don't take God seriously. We go through the last few weeks of the church year; we move through advent and we hear Christ proclaim: **"Behold I am coming soon."** After hearing that we lay our heads down at night, fully expecting that "the sun'll come out, tomorrow." Sure, God said He was coming soon, but we know better, don't we? It'll be a ways out yet. I mean maybe in the next few years or so, but tomorrow???

That's a problematic attitude, and one that we operate with far too often. When God says something, it's best not to take it lightly at all, but instead, take it immediately and deeply to heart. Yet our hearts seem like they are made of stone at times. Maybe that's not true of you. Maybe you are well attuned to the immanent reality of Christ's return, but also, maybe, you kind of feel like you've done your part. You've put in the time or given the money. Your work here is done.

Either way, and many more ways, we are like our 1<sup>st</sup> century brothers and sisters. We are so self-satisfied by our wonderful reasoning, our righteous deeds, or our own profound spirituality that we have forgotten the reality we are reminded of today. I need that reminder, and chances are you do as well. **"Time is short."** With these words we are reminded of how we fall far short of the calling we have been given: the calling to imitate what we know of our God.

Our God who looked at our sinful, selfish, and self-seeking ways; who saw the mess we had made, and **"at just the right time, He sent forth His Son. Born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law."** He didn't wait for us to admit our problems before intervening. He didn't wait to see if we would agree to His gracious terms before stepping in. He didn't wait for our commitment to change. He stepped in and acted, because our need is so profound. Even living after the immensely important events of His life death and resurrection, we still lose sight of its reality.

But He did what was required. He accomplished for us what was so urgently needed. He shouldered our sentence. He bore our sin. He took God's wrath for it all. He did this for us. He did this for you. He marched with unwavering resolve toward that cross, and toward that hill, and in doing so, won for you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

He acted urgently, there, in those waters. He asked you for nothing, but there, where water joined together with His promise and command, He forgave your sins. He claimed you as His own child. He gave you the gifts of life and salvation. So that you might live each and every day of this life marked by loving purposes of God. What's more, when this life comes to its close, the promise of that blessed work shines all the more, as God gave you eternal life there.

He continues to act urgently for you here, at this table. He doesn't wait for the day and the hour only He knows to come to you again. Instead, as often as we would come together here, He spreads a table before us in the presence of our enemies. The cup overflows with grace upon grace for you.

But one day, again, at just the right time, God will send His Son. And you and I, and those Corinthian believers will see our hope fulfilled with our own eyes. We will fully realize that the time was always short. For now, though, that reality should ring in our ears today. It should remind us of the wonderful way in which our gracious Father acted toward us, and remind us that the time we have here is short.

So, we thank God for the wonderful gifts we find in things like our Lutheran schools, and especially in Emmanuel-St. Michael, where the work continues on each and every day. We thank God who gives life, who delivers to us new children born each and every day, with ears to hear the loving purposes of the One who gave life. And we press on, all the more in this work, as we see the day drawing near. And as we do, the prayer of the church continues: Come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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