

**All the Time in the World – a sermon delivered at the
Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship
Thunder Bay, Ontario on Sunday, March 8, 2015**

Reading #1: “I Think Over Again My Small Adventure” an Inuit song

I think over again my small adventures, my fears.
These small ones that seemed so big,
For all the vital things I had to get and to reach.

And yet there is only one great thing,
The only thing:
To live to see the great day that dawns
And the light that fills the world.

Reading #2: “Time XXI” by **Khalil Gibran**

And an astronomer said, "Master, what of Time?"

And he answered:

You would measure time the measureless and the immeasurable.

You would adjust your conduct and even direct the course of your spirit according to hours and seasons.

Of time you would make a stream upon whose bank you would sit and watch its flowing.

Yet the timeless in you is aware of life's timelessness,

And knows that yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream.

And that which sings and contemplates in you is still dwelling within the bounds of that first moment which scattered the stars into space.

Who among you does not feel that his power to love is boundless?

And yet who does not feel that very love, though boundless, encompassed within the centre of his being, and moving not from love thought to love thought, nor from love deeds to other love deeds?

And is not time even as love is, undivided and paceless?

But if in your thought you must measure time into seasons, let each season encircle all the other seasons,

And let today embrace the past with remembrance and the future with longing.

Sermon/Reflection: “All the Time in the World” by the Rev. **Suzanne** Wasilczuk

The day begins.

*Yonder come day, day is a breakin'
Yonder come day, o my soul
Yonder come day, day is a breakin'
Sun is a risin' in my soul.*

It's about time.

The day ends.

*Day is done .. Gone the sun ...
From the lakes... From the hills... From the sky ..
All is well, Safely rest ... God is nigh.*

The first song from the Georgia Islands, *Yonder Come Day*, thought to be a work song created by enslaved Africans.

The second song, used in American scouting & also known as *Taps* in the American military. In the Montana Women's Chorus we always modified the last line:

"All is well, safely rest, we are nigh."

It's about time.

Time. A day is full of time.

Time. We save it. [Especially this time of year. We save an hour, to be relished come next autumn.]

We use it – we use it wisely.

We waste it.

We serve time in prison.

We take the time.

And we don't give someone the time of day.

We keep time with the music.

We seize the day *Carpe diem*.

Sometimes we feel like time is running out.

We write bucket lists – compendia of all the things we want to do before our time runs out.

And, there are the rare occasions when we feel we have all the time in the world.

"Time is what clocks measure"

And "time is what keeps everything from happening at once."

We keep track of time, and measure it.

We measure our everyday time, our secular time – *chronos*, regular time – in a variety of ways.

It's about time.

In ancient Egypt, we measured the passage of time with T-squares, the shadow cast by its crossbar.

Sundials.

Jessica Kerwin Jenkins tells us: "For millennia, people had lived without clocks, and many of them liked it that way. As an ancient Roman poet wrote,

*The gods confound the man who first found out
How to distinguish hours! Confound him, too,
Who in this place set up a sundial,
To cut and hack my days so wretchedly... [40]*

Folks have used water clocks, incense sticks, candles to measure time.

We measure time with hourglasses [“**Like sands** through the hourglass, so are the Days of Our Lives.”]

Smart Time

A man is strolling past the mental hospital and suddenly remembers an important meeting.

Unfortunately, his watch has stopped, and he cannot tell if he is late or not. Then, he notices a patient similarly strolling about within the hospital fence.

Calling out to the patient, the man says, “Pardon me, sir, but do you have the time?”

The patient calls back, “One moment!” and throws himself upon the ground, pulling out a short stick as he does. He pushes the stick into the ground, and, pulling out a carpenter’s level, assures himself that the stick is vertical.

With a compass, the patient locates north and with a steel ruler, measures the precise length of the shadow cast by the stick.

Withdrawing a slide rule from his pocket, the patient calculates rapidly, then swiftly packs up all his tools and turns back to the pedestrian, saying, “It is now precisely 3:29 pm, provided today is August 16th, which I believe it is.”

The man can’t help but be impressed by this demonstration, and sets his watch accordingly.

Before he leaves, he says to the patient, “That was really quite remarkable, but tell me, what do you do on a cloudy day, or at night, when the stick casts no shadow?” The patient holds up his wrist and says, “I suppose I’d just look at my watch.”

We have pendulum clocks, old grandfather clocks, heirlooms of a slower era. Cuckoo clocks, traditionally manufactured in the Black Forest in Germany, strike the hours with a mechanical cuckoo bird sounding its call.

Two great bronze figures [one old, one young], hinged at the waist, strike the hours on the bell of St. Mark’s Clocktower [the Piazza San Marcos] in Venice. The tower includes a winged lion, statues of the Virgin Mary and the three Magi, and angel with a trumpet, the sun, the moon, the signs of the zodiac.

The passage of the hours at sea is marked by bells, a bell marking each half hour of a watch – the end of a watch is marked with 8 bells – at 4am, 8am, noon, 4pm and so on.

Until fairly recently all time was local, set to an individual town’s clock tower.

It was in 1883 that American and Canadian railroads established four time zones across the continent to end the confusion of dealing with thousands of local times.

Or, if you lived in a village or the country, your day was set to the rising and setting of the sun.

It's about time.

Sami time

The Samis are the indigenous peoples of Arctic Norway, Sweden and Finland. The Sami people base their days on Nature, the life cycles of the reindeer. Time moves from the

herd's migration from the forests to the mountainous calving grounds in late winter/early spring. Calves are born, reindeer graze and calves are marked in the summer; the Sami choosing those reindeer they must slaughter in preparation for winter; the season of rut and of fishing in autumn; and finally the Sami lead the reindeer herd back into the forest in preparation for the 24-hour darkness of winter.

We in the West keep time on calendars [the Gregorian calendar, named after the correction introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582].

Old-fashioned paper calendars; paper day-timers.

In our hyper-scheduled cult of Getting Things Done, we may note our doings, and our things-that-need-to-get-done on these calendars, in these day-timers or, more probably, on the calendar in our smart phone. Appointments every ten or fifteen minutes of each day.

As Jessica Kerwin Jenkins tells us in her quirky book ***All the Time in the World: A Book of Hours***: “Google calendars sync with our laptops [both home and office], which, in turn, download data to devices that bleep in the middle of the [day, to tell us we’re due somewhere, right now] or bleep in the middle of the night whenever it’s time to pay a bill.” [2]

We measure secular time – *chronos* – in these varieties of ways.

Time Travel

We might ask if it would be possible to travel into the future or the past.

Time travel has been a plot device in fiction since the 19th century, producing books [H. G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* or Diana Gabaldon’s *Outlander* series]; and movies [*Back to the Future*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure*], and a few songs.

Time Warp from *Rocky Horror Picture Show*

Sung: *It's just a jump to the left
And then a step to the right*

*With your hands on your hips
You bring your knees in tight*

*But it's the pelvic thrust
That really drives you insane
Let's do the Time Warp again
Let's do the Time Warp again*

British theoretical physicist and cosmologist, Stephen Hawking tells us that the possibility of time travel exists. But he’s not about to bet on it. [Hawking, 169]

It's about time.

In science time is not the same everywhere in the universe. Not all observers perceive time as the same.

The theory of relativity says that there is no unique measure of time that all observers will agree on. [Hawking, 162]

To a crew traveling between regions of space, what seems like seconds to the crew might be perceived as hundreds of years to the stationary observer.

Science has a whole list of the length or duration of time.

An *instant* is, loosely speaking, zero time.

But a *Planck time unit* – [named after physicist Max Planck] a Planck length, is the smallest duration light might ever travel [roughly 10 to the minus 43 seconds.]

A *jiffy* in electronics is 1/50th of a second.

There are *zeptoseconds* and *picoseconds*, and *nanoseconds* and *milliseconds*.

A *moment* was calculated by Medieval European computists as 1/40th of an hour.

A *fortnight* is 14 days. This is especially important to know if you read Jane Austen.

A *leap year* is 366 days long and, if you're female, you can ask a male to marry you during its duration.

An *Olympiad* has a 4-year cycle. These days we have overlapping Olympiad, with Olympic games occurring every two years.

A *jubilee*, with its concurrent forgiveness of all debts and freeing of slaves and prisoners, happens every 50 years.

Getting to the long end of the spectrum, a *galactic year* is about 230 million years, the time it takes our sun to orbit the center of the Milky Way galaxy once.

An *eon* is half a billion years or so.

And a *cosmological decade* starts about 10 seconds after the Big Bang, and is 10 times the length of this cosmological period.

Geology has its own geologic time scale, delineating the events that shaped the Earth.

History has its own way of describing time in eras, reigns, conquests, discoveries and such.

It's about time.

But science is not so sure that time is a thing.

Scientist Erwin Schrodinger tells us: "Eternally and always there is only now, one and the same now; the present is the only thing that has no end."

Werner Eisenberg stated: "The common words 'space' and 'time' refer to a structure of space and time that is actually an idealization and oversimplification."

And Albert Einstein said, "People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubborn illusion."

[And Buddhists agree.

"There is nothing like an absolute time which remains as a reality apart from successive events. Time and space are derived notions, modes of reference," says K. Venkata Ramanan.

And D. T. Suzuki states: “The past and future are both rolled up in this present moment of illumination, and this present moment is not something standing still with all its contents, for it ceaselessly moves on.”

And “As a fact of pure experience, there is no space without time, nor time without space; they are interpenetrating.”

[*Einstein and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*]

It's about time.

In science, the beginning of the universe is often called the Big Bang.

The beginning of the universe occurred 13.7 billion years ago.

The beginning of earth arose 4.5 billion years ago.

[When people of faith who are also people of science speak of this moment they may characterize it as the Great Radiance, the Flaring Forth, the Great Cosmic Emergence.]

Astrophysicist Stephen Hawking has stated that time actually began with the Big Bang, that questions about what happened before the Big Bang are meaningless.

Einstein's general theory of relativity implies that the universe must have a beginning and, possibly, an end. [Hawking, 35] but Stephen Hawking speculates that the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, without beginning or end. [At least that's how I read it in his *Brief History of Time*. Makes my head hurt.]

We measure secular time – chronos – in a variety of ways.

It's about time.

Religions have a variety of ways to measure time.

We measure sacred time – *kairos* – in other ways.

St. Augustine in his *Confessions* calls time a “distention” of the mind by which we simultaneously grasp the past in memory, the present by attention, and the future by expectation. [*Confessions* 11.26]

Christianity and Islam see time as linear, with a beginning and an end.

When Biblical literalists count up the years, they come to a very different number for the beginning of it all.

Jessica Kerwin Jenkins describes it this way:

“The earth was created ‘on October 23, 4004 BC at nine o'clock in the morning,’ the English scholar Sir John Lightfoot [1602-1675] announced in 1644, having calculated the precise moment by adding together every time span mentioned in the Bible. Lightfoot's endeavors were symptomatic of the seventeenth century's mounting obsession with accuracy, dividing time into smaller and smaller increments.” [40]

Biblical literalists see the beginning as the act of creation by God.

In Christian time, history begins with the *Preparation* to receive the Christ, the *Fulfillment* when, in the fullness of time, God sends forth his Son, and the *Consummation*, when Christ will return.

In Islam time starts with Mohammed receiving the words of the *Quran*.

And the world is also seen to be moving toward an end time.

The **Apocalypse** [the uncovering or unveiling] is seen as the complete and final destruction of the world as told in the Book of Revelation

Polls tells us that as many as 50% of Americans believe in the **Book of Revelation** is a true, accurate representation of the End Times.

That includes **Armageddon** [any end of the world scenario, or the specific spot where armies will meet at the end of the world], the **Tribulation** [a relatively short period of time where everyone will experience worldwide hardships, disasters, famine, war, pain, and suffering, which will wipe out more than 75% of all life on the earth before the Second Coming takes place], and the **Rapture** [the idea that true Christians, with the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ, will spontaneously rise in the air to meet him.

For Shiite Muslims the end times will include the reappearance of the 12th Imam, the rightful spiritual and political successor of Mohammed, who was placed in hiding by God in the mid-9th century.

“We are a people impatient to see our world redeemed through catastrophe – and we are always wrong.” [*New York Times*, “The Final Days,” Benjamin Anastas, July 2007]
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/01/magazine/01world-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0;
 accessed 27 February 2015.

Early Christian gnostics predicted the world would end as early as the 1st century. Shakers believed the world would end in 1792.

And a **Rapture Index** measures instances of False Christs, Satanism, apostasy, false prophets, earthquakes, plagues, famine, droughts, and evidence of the supernatural.
<http://www.raptureready.com/rap2.html>; accessed 27 February 2015.

Y2K had folks by the thousands stocking up on water, toilet paper, and generators.

Harmonic Convergence – a time when the spirits of light and dark battle for the fate of the world; the transformation of consciousness, universal telepathy, galactic alignment

[There exists a nuclear scientist **Doomsday Clock** – of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, tells us that it is now 3 minutes to midnight, that is, the end of humanity.]

It's about time. Chronos. Kairos.

Other religions see time as cyclical.

In Hinduism, and in some branches of Buddhism, a person is reincarnated, a cycle of unending rebirth.

The Mayan calendar encompasses three different calendars – the Haab cycle of 365 days, the Tzolk'in with its 260 unique days, and the Calendar Round, the interweaving of the previous two calendars. So, no combination repeats itself until 52 periods of 365 days have passed. And so, in the Mayan belief, a person reaching 52 years of age attains the special wisdom of an elder.

Finally, the Maya Long Count calendar begins with the mythical creation date [around August 11, 3114 BCE] and counts five cycles. According to this long count, the cycles would end on Dec. 20th of 2012. Or maybe just begin again.

The Mayan Calendar – “It is a splendid, human-sized dream, that an ancient people, revered for unearthly wisdom could climb aboard a calendar ship and redeem us from our troubled world and the confines of our vexing natures... End dates are not the stuff of fantasy, after all; each and every one of us has a terminal appointment inscribed in our calendars. And the end might just arrived sooner.

Perhaps that is why we need to imagine a supernatural force with one eye on the ticking clock, waiting to make everything new again.”

[*New York Times*, “The Final Days,” Benjamin Anastas, July 2007]

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/01/magazine/01world-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0;
accessed 27 February 2015.

Kairos, spiritual time, is the path to a spiritual goal – enlightenment or salvation.

It's about time. Chronos. Kairos. Linear or not.

We measure sacred time – *kairos* – in non-clock ways.

Kairos, in the New Testament, means ‘the appointed time in the purpose of God,’ the time when God acts.

In Eastern Orthodox churches *kairos* is seen as an intersection with Eternity, with timeless time.

Kairos encompasses those moments when we feel we have all the time in the world.

A special time, a time when events come into focus.

A time when we can say, “This I will remember forever.”

Kairos is a time when we are called to pay attention.

Maybe a time when someone says, “I love you.”

As Time Goes By, Song by Frank Sinatra

Sung: *You must remember this*

A kiss is still a kiss

A sigh is still (just) a sigh

*The fundamental things apply
As time goes by
And when two lovers woo
They still say: I love you
On that you can rely
No matter what the future brings
As time goes by*

A moment when we are told of a life-threatening illness, that time left is measurable.

Sung:

*Five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred minutes
How do you measure, measure a year?*

*In daylights, in sunsets
In midnights, in cups of coffee
In inches, in miles, in laughter, in strife
In five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred minutes
How do you measure, a year in the life?*

*How about love?
How about love? [Music from the musical *Rent*]*

Time in a Bottle by Jim Croce

*If I could save time in a bottle
The first thing that I'd like to do
Is to save every day 'til eternity passes away
Just to spend them with you*

*But there never seems to be enough time
To do the things you want to do once you find them.
I've looked around enough to know
You're the one I want to go through time with.*

[This song reached Number one on the Billboard charts in 1973, three months after Croce, 30 years old, died in a plane crash while flying between concerts dates.]

As Khalil Gibran tells us: “Is not time even as love is, undivided and pacesless?”

But in whatever conception of faith you might hold – Christian, Buddhist, humanist, earth-centered – value is place on living in the moment.

Whether time is “a chain of mathematical instants, an unrepeatable succession of experienced moments, or an irreversible continuous flow,” faith “bestows a sacredness to each living moment.”

[*The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, 681]

I think over again my small adventures, my fears.
These small ones that seemed so big,

For all the vital things I had to get and to reach.

And yet there is only one great thing,
The only thing:
To live to see the great day that dawns
And the light that fills the world.

Time becomes a value-laden moment. A moment of timelessness. A remembering of our connection with each other, with the earth. A space in which we have all the time in the world.

It's about time. Chronos. Kairos. Linear or cyclical.

May we all find that place in which we experience all the time in the world.

May it be so. May we make it so. Blessed be. And amen.