

*Order of Service – September 4, 2016
The Fullness of Time*

Musical Prelude

Greeting -- September Meditation

1st Hymn: Eternal and Infinite Source of All Grace, Green 27

*Readings -- 2Corinthians 6:2; Mark 13:33; Ephesians 1:9-10; “Guidelines,” by
Rita Espaillat*

2nd Hymn: Love Divine All Loves Excelling, Green 150

Joys and Concerns

Musical interlude

Prayer -- Joy of heaven to earth come down.

3rd Hymn: Turn, Turn, Turn, Blue 28

Pastoral reflection or message

Silent worship

4th Hymn: Holy, Holy, Holy, Green 5

Benediction -- Now is the day of Salvation, Now is the Time to Love

Thank yous/ Introductions / Remembrances/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude

Greeting: Good morning, Friends. It is September again. Yesterday, a single red leaf fluttered down in front of me on a walk. I always feel, each September, an acute sense of time passing, and the urgency to savor each moment as it passes. So, here is a poem called September Meditation, by Burton D. Carley, to begin this First worship day of September together.

I do not know if the seasons remember their history or if the days and nights by which we count time remember their own passing.

I do not know if the oak tree remembers its planting or if the pine remembers its slow climb toward sun and stars.

I do not know if the squirrel remembers last fall's gathering or if the bluejay remembers the meaning of snow.

I do not know if the air remembers September or if the night remembers the moon.

I do not know if the earth remembers the flowers from last spring or if the evergreen remembers that it shall stay so.

Perhaps that is the reason for our births—to be the memory for creation.

Perhaps salvation is something very different than anyone ever expected.

Perhaps this will be the only question we will have to answer:

"What can you tell me about September?"

If it turns out that Salvation is having paid attention, perhaps paying attention is also one way to pray. So let us start our prayer with song, and call our attention together to the way that the Eternal and Infinite Source of All Grace is alive in this time and this place. ***Our first hymn is from the Green hymnal, number 27.***

Readings:

Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6: 2

Take heed, stay awake, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time will come. Mark 13: 33

Rhina Espaillat: "Guidelines"

Here's what you need to do, since time began: find something—diamond-rare or carbon-cheap, it's all the same—and love it all you can.

*It should be something close—a field, a man,
a line of verse, a smile, a child asleep—
that feels like the world's heart since time began.*

*Don't measure much or lay things out or scan;
don't save yourself for later, you won't keep;
spend yourself now on loving all you can.*

*It's going to hurt. That was the risk you ran
with your first breath; you knew the price was steep,
that loss is what there is, since time began*

*subtracting from your balance. That's the plan,
too late to quibble now, you're in too deep.
Just love what you still have, while you still can.*

*Don't count on schemes, it's far too short a span
from the first sowing till they come to reap.
One way alone to count, since time began:
love something, love it hard, now, while you can.*

Ephesians 1:9-10 *he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

Second Hymn: Love Divine All Loves Excelling, Green 150

Prayer

God of all time, God of all Seasons, awaken us now, gather us into you. Let this season of our lives belong to you. Love Divine, All Loves Excelling, fix in us your humble dwelling. That we may learn to love as you do, to bless and be blessed, to be present and awake in this moment. We are human, Oh God, and we get tired. Our love gets tired. It is hard to stay awake. Remind us that we are never separate from you, the Eternal and Infinite Source of All Grace....as you dwell in us, we dwell in you....so may we make of this time, this moment, this hour, this September day a sacrament, a prayer of watchfulness, of wakefulness, of readiness

to love. Of Willingness to pay attention. To give our time to you. Thou wellspring of holiness, indwelling, infinite love, please enliven us here today. wake us, open our eyes and embolden our hearts to love, here, now, while we can. Let this season be yours. For this we pray. Amen.

Third Hymn: Turn, Turn, Turn, Blue 28

Benediction

And so, may we know that in the fullness of time, all is holy, holy, holy. And the God of Love Unending calls us to

Pay Attention To this September Day.

May we take heed, stay awake, watch and pray; for we do not know when God's time will come. And now is the day of Salvation. Now is the time to love.

Message:

Ten years ago, my then-future husband George and I inaugurated what would become our annual end-of-summer ritual, attending the New York State Fair in Syracuse. I had grown up making this yearly pilgrimage, taking the bus from Auburn with my parents and siblings. So, in the late summer of 2006, as it became clear to both George and I that the relationship growing between us was the real thing, we went to the Fair. If you've never been, the Fair is a really distinct experience of cultural excess and sensory stimulation, a dizzying diversity of people to watch and exorbitantly priced carnival rides, products, games and exhibits to try, intemperate amounts of foods you didn't know could be fried, every kind of sugary treat, the smells and the sounds of hundreds and hundreds of farm animals, the vestiges and comforting rituals of a way of life governed by agriculture, and totally unsustainable resource use and waste production. The traffic is usually pretty heavy getting into and out of the parking lots, and the parking lots are acres and acres of shimmering heat, sun glinting on windshields, dust, exhaust, and port-a-potties. On this day that I'm remembering, George and I found a parking space a mile away from the entrance, in a lot separated from the fair by the east and westbound lanes of the 690 highway. We walked, and walked, missing the shuttle buses at each stop as we got closer to the fair, or getting to the stops in time but finding ourselves behind such a crowd that there wasn't room for us on that bus. So we kept walking, getting hotter and dustier, breathing in the exhaust, holding hands, and talking. The air smelled of hot tar. A hawk flew overhead. The landscape was terrifically ugly. There was broken glass, and trash. We walked over the roaring of the highway on the pedestrian bridge, got to the entrance of the fair, stood in the ticket line because we had pre-purchased tickets, finally got to the ticket-taker, and realized that we had left the tickets in the car. We turned around and kept talking.

The treks all the way back to the car, and then all the way back again to the entrance were just as good as the first journey. I think we could have spent our whole trip just walking back and forth in the purgatory of the parking lot and not have minded never getting anywhere.

I share this memory because the occasion of its 10th anniversary has brought the reflection that when George and I were walking through the dust and the exhaust with love in the front of our experience, there was no such thing as a wasted time, or a wasted place. There was nothing else that should have happened, no where else we should have been, nothing else we should have been doing with our time. There was not one part of us wishing that something could be different. An inconvenience was an opportunity to be together, to live in that moment, in love, even in a place as totally aesthetically unappealing and ecologically problematic as the endless parking lot of The State Fair. Even the glaring display of excess, the discarded bottles by the sides of the path, the truck carrying mountains of trash bags going by underneath us -- the way we were awake suffused the whole imperfect world with beauty.

That's what love can do. And it doesn't have to be romantic love. It could be love of a child, love of an animal, love of a stranger, love of a lake, a stream, birds, the way light falls across the floor in the afternoon, the perfect September sky, the wind in the trees, a neighbor walking her dog. You can give your true and real and focused attention to anything. There is so much to love. When I was a teenager taking the bus to Auburn high school, every morning just before a certain crossroads there would always be this man, smoking a cigarette in a doorway. Every morning, right around 7:30, just as my bus passed, he would always be there. And it got so that we would look for each other and wave. I still remember those moments. The uncomfortable cracked vinyl seat, the bus always too hot, my lunch bag on the seat next to me. And the man and I would look for each other, and smile a little, and wave. Any moment has the potential to be that kind of moment when time stops, when chronological time becomes infused with another kind of time, an eternal kind of time, what the Bible might call "the fullness of time."

The ancient Greeks had two words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. From *chronos* comes the word 'chronological.' It refers to clock time – time that can be measured – seconds, minutes, hours, years. *Kairos*, on the other hand, is not quantitative but qualitative. It is the pregnant pause, the moment that stretches out, when the whole world draws in a breath. *Kairos* is the right moment, the opportune moment, the fateful moment, the perfect moment.

It has a sense of attainment, maturity, 'ripeness'. One well known example is in the passage from the book of Ecclesiastes, from which was taken the words of our third hymn:

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted...” and so on. In the first Greek translations of the Bible, each use of the word ‘time’ in that passage is rendered as kairos, not chronos. It’s meant to convey God’s time, right here, right now, in the actual moments of our lives. It’s the present moment imbued with the fullness of time, a sense of timelessness within time, eternity within temporality. Time as momentous and revealing the whole we are part of, the whole that is greater than the sum of the parts. When time comes to a fullness, it stops, it expands, it flies, it defies the space-time continuum -- it does something other than measure. That’s kairos.

In 1985, a group of mainly black South African theologians wrote the Kairos Document, a challenge to the church’s response to the recent violent crackdowns by the Apartheid government. The Document’s first words were “The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived,” and it was pervaded with a strong sense that, as it is written in the Gospel of Mark, the time was fulfilled, the moment was at hand: the fate of South Africa hung in the balance, and small actions might have the power to change the path of history. But kairos doesn’t have to be as dramatic as that. It can be a small moment in one person’s life that is ripe, and full, and poised, awake. Often those moments arrive because of love. Because love has the power to wake us up, to make us pay attention, to transform our experience of ourselves and of time. Love can make the one moment we have an eternal one, and the one body we have an infinite one.

But there will come a time when love like that will take work, when it will be a choice to be awake and ready, because it will be hard to pay that kind of attention, the kind of attention that is prayer, that is the way to Salvation, that is the way of love. There will be times when it will not be effortless. Because sometimes the gritty parking lots will get you down, you will grow weary and despair of the ugliness human beings leave in our wake. There will be hot and cranky kids in tow, or sickness will blindsides you, or overtake your beloved, and nothing will be easy, every step will be labored. Those are the times when being present to the opportunity and invitation of this one moment we have to live, in love, takes something like determination, like practice, like endurance. Some kairos moments, it will be no small feat to *Take heed, to stay awake, to watch and pray. To be ready. To behold, suddenly, that now is the acceptable time, now is the Day of Salvation, the time to love while we can, the moment when we just might see all things on heaven and earth gathered up in the fullness of God’s time.*

