

Christ Culture: You've Got the Time!

A sermon based on Luke 14:15-24.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"525,600 minutes – how do you measure, measure a year?" Thankfully, the fine people who produced the hit musical "Rent" already figured that one out for me. 525,600 minutes. Over half a million minutes in a year. When you think about it, it sounds like a lot. But how does the old adage go? "So much to do, so little time."

About halfway through summer...how many of you are exhausted? I am. Do you ever long for those days, years ago when you were a kid, and summer meant sleeping in, biking to the pond, fishing for hours, playing pick-up games of baseball with the neighborhood kids, watching way too much TV, maybe the occasional family trip, but overall, fairly relaxing, not overly stressed at all...that's not today.

An online article written last year from "The Atlantic" shared how in the past (the beginning of the 1900's), being wealthy meant you could sit back, relax, enjoy life's little pleasures. In our culture today, though, we've experienced a seismic shift, where busyness is increasingly being looked at as a symbol of status. In that same article, Silvia Bellezza, a professor of marketing at Columbia Business School, shared the results of a study she led, **"What we found is that in the U.S., people think that the busier person must be of higher status...It turns out that you can boost your status by seeming like you're busy."**

Maybe that's not fully your mindset. But that is our culture today. We pride ourselves on packing our schedules. Busyness is the norm, and it's even becoming that way for our children. Everything is important. Everything is vying for our time, and it seems, it feels like we're always running short on time.

But here's a little secret: we all have the same amount of time...1440 minutes every day, to be exact. Ok, no secret there. It's the same as it's been since the beginning of time. The amount of time you and I have is constant. That hasn't changed.

What has changed is how we're spending the allotment of time we've been given here.

Today, I want to focus on the allotment of time we're setting aside for Jesus. This is a good, comfortable space to do that. Now, I know you could say, "As believers, every moment we ought to be living for Jesus." And yes, there's so much right with that statement, but I mean time we are intentionally devoting to Jesus. So, that would include the time we spend learning about Jesus and growing in our faith in Jesus and also the time we give serving Jesus, specifically volunteering or doing the work of the church.

In your mind, if you were to break down your average day – or maybe even your average week, how much time are you intentionally setting aside for Jesus – for growth and for service? Put a number to it...maybe even write it down.

For comparison, the Wall Street Journal, a couple of years ago, ran an article breaking down an average day for the average, working person. Here's what it looks like: about 8.5 hours for personal care (mostly sleep); a little over 8 hours for work; eating, drinking, TV, leisure, sports makes up about 4.5 hours, about 2.5 hours for shopping cleaning, caring for the family; and finally, about .15 hours doing civic or religious activities. That's averaged over the week. That's where our culture is. How do those numbers compare with what you wrote down?

When our mission counselor was up here in May, he told me how recent studies have shown that regular worship attendance these days is once a month. The average Christian is satisfied with feeding their faith once a

month. And as for service in a congregation, the number that's sticking in my head is 1 hour. The average church member volunteers at their church for about an hour a month.

Think about those two numbers for a moment. About 2 hours a month is what the average Christian today is investing in their spiritual life with worship attendance and volunteering for their church. Where are you at?

When I was dating Becky (so at least 10 years ago), I recall driving to her apartment on a Sunday morning, either to pick her up from church or to drop her off after, how taken aback I was at how crowded the soccer complex by her apartment was...on a Sunday. To me, Sunday's always been church day. But today, that's not the norm. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, the rest of the week...soccer, sports, overtime on the job, working weekends, meetings at night, vacations, weekend trips, hanging out with friends, spending more time with the family, working on home projects, you name it.

The bottom line: there's so much fighting for our time today, what you hold as most valuable is where you prioritize your time. Hear that again: what you hold as most valuable, what you treasure is where you prioritize your time.

Can you see how the devil is using this to his advantage? Like finding time for worship? What is our culture's axiom? "Time is money," emphasizing how we shouldn't be wasting our time because we could be using it to earn money, which explains why, for so many today, 40 hours of work each week is a minimum...working weekends is, in some instances, almost expected today.

Or, the excuse, "I'm too busy!" I get it. I know summer's busy. I sent out an email earlier this past week about "vacationing with God," finding time to worship while away from home this summer. Maybe a two, three minute read (although, to be fair, my lovely wife did point out I sent that email lumped together with two other emails). I was hoping it would be an encouragement for you. Did you read it?

How about the way you use your free time? I present the smartphone, the double-edged sword. In some moments, it can truly be the greatest time-saver, with all the information you have at your fingertips, you can call anyone, find directions to anywhere. And then, at other times, it's the greatest time-waster, like, I admit, the times when I could be doing devotions are passed over for playing Sudoku or browsing Facebook for the tenth time today.

Or, when it comes to spending time serving Jesus, getting involved at church. For my middle schoolers in Catechism class, part of the requirements of the class is that they do 15 hours of service work at church or for the church. A little more than an hour a month. 900 minutes to be exact. Now, remember there are 1440 minutes in a day. 15 hours would be 0.17% of your entire year, intentionally set aside to serve Jesus. Even if you take into account getting a generous 8 hours of sleep each night, it's bumped up to about 0.25%.

I won't even try to throw out other numbers for comparison...I'm going to leave that up to you...your favorite TV show, what sports you enjoy playing or watching, the time you spend with your hobby, working around the house, hanging out with friends...not saying none of that is important. But put those numbers up against the time spent in worship, the time you spend serving Jesus. Again, what you hold as most valuable is where you prioritize your time.

I think Jesus foresaw this struggle with our time, the temptations we would deal with because I can't help but look at today's gospel from Luke and see so many striking similarities to our lives today. Take a look yourself. A wealthy man prepares this lavish feast – the choicest of wines, the filet mignon of meats, easily \$100/plate. His guest list had been prepared for weeks, meaning the initial invitations were already accepted...the RSVP's made.

But Jewish custom dictated that another announcement be made when the feast was ready. But now, all of a sudden, other interests took priority. "I just bought a new field; I need to check it out (although no one, even back then, would buy a field without seeing it first)." "I bought a bunch of new oxen; I have to take them out for a test drive (although, again, no one would make that kind of investment without first trying the oxen out). Still another, "I just got married, and with the honeymoon and all, we just can't make it (even though he had known about this banquet for some time prior).

Isn't it obvious from the parable which Jesus tells that not everyone really regards God's salvation banquet as something so wonderful? The excuses, how the first two put property and possession above partaking in the banquet of salvation. The claims of money take precedence. And then, for the third guest, his excuse involves family responsibilities. He considers family matters more important than accepting the invitation.

Can you see the similarities in our excuses today? God prepares this lavish feast of his Word for you here, but..."Sunday is family day (but God and your church family can't be part of it?)." "I just got this new 4-wheeler and gotta turn up some mud with it." "We're headed out of town this weekend to go to a wedding, and well, we won't be able to come to church here, and plus, we'll be really tired from the wedding the night before, so, not going to be able to make it to any church."

You know, it would have been just as easy (and honest) for those guests in Jesus' parable to say, "Really, I just don't want to come." "Really, I just don't have the desire to serve." Again, I get it. I've been there. I've felt that. But they are what they are...just excuses. If that's your attitude today...if making time for Jesus, both for growing in your faith in him and also expressing that faith in the way that you serve him...if that hasn't been, if it isn't a priority for you today, then it's time to start re-thinking your priorities.

Remember how Jesus finished up his parable? The master, once his servant came back with all of these rejected invitations, he simply moved on, "They had their chance. They obviously don't have time for me. I'm done with them. Go, find other guests."

Thankfully, the Master hasn't done that with you and me for the times we get our priorities messed up. Instead, God prioritized you. Here's the proof: the Bible says, "**When the time had fully come, God sent his Son.**"

Maybe, let's first take a moment to sit back, relax, take a stroll through the garden...of Eden. Adam and Eve had sinned against God, eaten fruit God forbade them from eating. God confronted them with their sinful obedience, they confessed their sins, and then, immediately, God's loving response, "**I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.**" That was God's first promise to send a Savior from sin. It was immediate; no time passed where Adam and Eve had to wonder what would happen to them because of their sins.

And neither do you, because again, "**When the time had fully come, God sent his Son.**"

God prioritized your salvation by sending his own Son – Jesus – to live and die and rise for you. And for Jesus, his life here wasn't "how little can I do for my heavenly Father." Every moment, Jesus concerned himself with serving his Father and showing and sharing the love of God. Which led to his death on the cross, which he alluded to a couple days prior when he said, "**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.**" In his perfect timing, God sent Jesus, who spent all of his time here on earth working to save you...through his perfect life, his death on the cross paying for your sins, and his resurrection, guaranteeing that forgiveness for eternity.

And now, we get to prioritize Jesus...spending time with him in worship, growing in our faith in him...spending time serving him, using our gifts – our time, our talents, our treasures – to do work for his church. Right? That's

Christ culture. That's the transformation we've undergone by the grace of God. We're not trying to figure out how little we can do. No, we zealously look at how we can prioritize worshipping Jesus and serving Jesus. Could there be any better use of our time? Not to God.

So what does prioritizing time for Jesus look like?

Well, let's look at your worship life? I'll tell you what I tell my catechism families..."God wants regular worship (right, he says, **"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing"**). I'm not going to dictate what regular worship is." If this is the lavish feast God spreads out for you, is feeding your faith in Jesus once a month going to cut it? I stuffed myself at the Alaska Salmon Bake a few days ago, and the next morning, I was still hungry. I can't imagine my faith is any different. Don't wait til you're starving!

But, what when summer – or even life – is getting so busy, and Satan's trying to push church out? You have options: Emailed Daily Bible Readings, but don't just sign up and let them go unopened, then to your spam folder. Take the time to work through the different devotional materials there. There's www.WELSAAlaska.com, showing you where our other churches in Alaska are, along with their worship schedules. Some of them even have live-stream worship services. If you're going Outside, www.wels.net (our Synod's website), has a list of churches throughout the country. You could download one of my sermons from our website. If you miss Sunday, this summer, during some of the weeks, we're having our FIT Bible Class. Again, you have options...to intentionalize the time spent with Jesus, growing in your faith in him.

And when it comes to serving Jesus, I'm right there with you, where there's always so much to do, so little time available to do it. How can I carve time out for Jesus? Well, two thoughts...1) if Jesus is really important to you (he's the most important, right?), then you may have to make some sacrifices, cut back on time spent at hobbies or sports or with friends or family (maybe make church time family time!)...but it's worth it!

And 2) focus on quality of time spent vs. quantity of time spent. I'm not expecting you to all of a sudden say, "I'm going to spend 15 hours a month serving the church (I would say no to that, either!)." But could you increase what you're doing by an hour. 60 minutes/month more volunteering or helping out at church. And then give it your full effort – you're serving Jesus! Watch our ministries explode!

You've got the time! When I was first trying to fit exercise and working out into my busy schedule years ago, that was the slogan for my fitness program, "10 Minute Trainer." "You've got the time, ten minutes!"

You've got the time – 525,600 minutes to be exact...over half a million I'll admit, even today, I still struggle to spend as much intentionalized time for God (worshipping, serving) as I'd like, but even ten minutes a day, it's a start, and, with his help, I'm making the most of it. That's Christ culture!

Would you join me? Would you join me in prayer to the God who's prioritized you, that you might prioritize him? Let's close with prayer:

Dear gracious giver of this new day, you remind me in your Word that your mercy is new every morning. You encourage me to rejoice today, for it is the day you have made. I've made such a mess of things. If only I could do things over. I am consumed and paralyzed with regret and remorse. Focus me on the cleansing power of Jesus' blood. Remind me that my past is forgiven and my future is in your good hands. Help me to live this day with joy in my heart, starting fresh as your redeemed child, determined to spend my time living for you, bringing glory to you alone.. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.