

Year B

Ephesians 5:15-20

The ancient writer of Ecclesiastes wrote:

“God has set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

How would you like to spend two years making phone calls to people who aren't at home? Does that sound absurd? According to one time management study, that's how much time the average person, over a lifetime, spends trying to return calls to people who never seem to be in. Not only

that, we spend 6 months waiting for the traffic light to turn green, and another 8 months reading junk mail. These unusual statistics should cause us to sit up and take notice. Once we recognise that everyday life activity can chip away at our time in such huge blocks, we may see how vital it is that we don't busy ourselves in vain.

In King David's complaint to God in Psalm 39, he wrote; "You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You" (v 5). He meant simply that to an eternal God our time on earth is brief. And God doesn't want us to waste it. When we

do, we throw away one of the most precious commodities he has given us. Each minute is an irretrievable gift - an unredeemable slice of eternity. Yes, we have to make the phone calls and we must wait at the traffic lights. But what about the rest of our time? Is our time well spent? The apostle Paul wanted us to make the most of the time. That little word for time is *kairos* which we have encountered before in recent weeks. It refers to the time of God's action; its reference is to the reality of the Kingdom come and coming in its fulness. All other demands must get into order behind this cosmic reality. Time,

kairos, is precious and urgent. The planet is in peril because the days are evil and so we must live in the light of that. It's interesting that the precarious nature of our existence is an established fact in our world. Must people acknowledge that the planet is fragile and if we don't look after it we will lose its gift of life nourishment. Must people acknowledge that evil is real and even if they refuse to accept that evil is a force or a power they would concede that people are capable of doing evil things. All of this places a great burden on our opportunities and so the

kairos, the times we live in, are of great importance.

So Paul wrote; “do not get drunk with wine”.

What’s the connection? What’s the connection between precious time and drunkenness? It seems that ever since the beginning of societies in this world alcohol has been an important element in social gatherings. It helps people to feel at ease; to relax and to enjoy one another’s company. In this sense it is social and it is positive. And Paul nowhere condemns the consumption of alcohol. But he does condemn its abuse.

A member of Alcoholics Anonymous once sent columnist Ann Landers the following:

“We drank for happiness and became unhappy.

We drank for joy and became miserable.

We drank for sociability and became argumentative.

We drank for sophistication and became obnoxious.

We drank for friendship and made enemies.

We drank for sleep and awakened without rest.

We drank for strength and felt weak.

We drank "medicinally" and acquired health problems.

We drank for relaxation and got the shakes.

We drank for bravery and became afraid.

We drank for confidence and became doubtful.

We drank to make conversation easier and slurred our speech.

We drank to feel heavenly and ended up feeling like hell.

We drank to forget and were forever haunted.

We drank for freedom and became slaves.

We drank to erase problems and saw them multiply.

We drank to cope with life and invited death.”¹

The missionary John G. Paton was invited to dinner with a wealthy friend. Paton noticed that the servant poured a glass of whiskey for his host. Somewhat embarrassed, the man explained, "I take a little whiskey for my cough on my doctor's prescription." Paton asked "How long have you been doing this?" "Eight years," came the reply. "Is your cough getting any better?" asked Paton. "No," answered the man. "Well," said Paton, "if I had a doctor who prescribed something for

¹ Bits & Pieces, May, 1990, p. 18

me for 8 years and it didn't help me, I would stop taking his prescriptions and get a new doctor.”

So, do not be foolish, Paul said. Don't try to escape from the sense of eternity, the sense of *kairos*, that God has placed in your heart, by drinking yourself into a stupor. The abuse of alcohol, instead of bringing people together, drives them apart until a suffering individual is all alone in despair.

Instead we are to seek to redeem time - to make the very most of time through the worship of God. You'll note that the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs is

a corporate activity. It is shared and so it is the case that we most clearly and naturally discover God in the fellowship we enjoy together. The South African concept of *ubuntu* says this most clearly. Archbishop Desmond Tutu defined it as follows:

“My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours. We belong in a bundle of life. We say; “A person is a person through other persons.” It is not “I think, therefore I am”. It is rather: “I am human because I belong. I participate. I share.” A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others..... for he or she

has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished,..... or treated as if they were less than they are.”²

Together we are able to find a God focus in these days, in the time of God’s kingdom, that we cannot find on our own. When that happens we find ourselves at pace with God’s time and not out of kilter with what is really happening.

After church, where she had been taught about the coming of Christ again, a little girl

² Tutu, Desmond 1999 *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday) p31

was quizzing her mother. "Mummy, do you believe Jesus will come back again?" "Yes." "Today?" "Yes." "In a few minutes?" "Yes, dear." "Mummy, would you comb my hair?" We're living in the days of the hair combing, if we've got any hair to comb! We're getting ready because it's the *kairos*, the time of God's kingdom and there's no time to waste.

Amen.