

During my time at the University of Cincinnati,

I was a member of a group called the student activities board.

We were the governing body for all student groups on campus.

One of our duties was to plan a leadership seminar

for the executive teams of all campus groups.

One year, we had a speaker who put things into perspective for me so well,

that I can still remember what he said clearly almost ten years later.

I would like to share with you one insight that he offered us.

We are all busy people. Right?

Most of us are over committed.

We spend our time going from one activity to another.

Even if we aren't over committed,

we don't often spend our time doing the things

we feel we should.

Instead, we continue to repeat actions and behaviors

that we know aren't life giving.

Or even worse, we may feel badly for not being overcommitted,

as though spreading ourselves too thin is a badge of honor.

So, what if we could add one more hour to the day.

What if, we could all band together,

petition the global government and convince the world

that we need to have a twenty-five hour day.

We have too much to do, and we require a 25th hour.

What could we do with that 25th hour?

Consider it for a moment.

We could spend a little extra time with our family or enjoying time with friends.

We could spend more time relaxing with a good book.

We could dust off our Bibles

and sit with the word of God more during the week.

We could exercise and care for our physical health better.

There are so many possibilities of what we could do,
if we only had a little more time.

But, my hunch is that if we each had one more hour in the day,
we would fill that hour doing exactly what we are doing with it now.

Running around,
continuing bad habits,
not watching what we eat,
and not caring for ourselves or for those that we love.

Perhaps a solution to our over busy-ness isn't adding time to our day,
but reorganizing and prioritizing what we do with our time.

These thoughts on time begin a new series for us
to explore a simpler way to live.

This comes during the season on the church calendar
that we have set aside to continue to celebrate Christ's resurrection.

Last week we heard again the best news that we hear in scripture.

Early in the morning on the first day of the week,
women went to Christ's tomb to anoint his body and they couldn't find it.

The tomb was empty.

Christ is risen!

(He is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

And that's great, it's the best news of the good news.

But now what do we do?

How do we respond to God's great triumph over sin and death?

Our gospel lesson today, the one that is appointed each year
for the week following Easter Sunday teaches us one way to respond.

And perhaps we hear it almost as tongue in cheek.

According to John's gospel, the disciples have recently heard from Mary Magdalene
that the tomb is empty.

Jesus really was raised from the dead just like he told them he would be.

And in response, they lock themselves in a room.

And sure, we can have sympathy for that, right?

They are afraid for themselves.

Look at what just happened to Jesus!

They are still stuck in Good Friday.

They are stuck in the feeling of loss and loneliness.

They haven't been shaken out of that sense of anxiety and fear yet.

They aren't acting with any sense of urgency that now is the time!

Jesus has accomplished everything he was sent to do,
just like he said he would!

Now is the time to go and do.

So what happens?

Jesus shows up.

The resurrected Christ appears in their midst.

The disciples see the **scarred hands and wounded side** and rejoice!

Then Jesus Christ gives them his peace
and breathes on them the Holy Spirit.

And he sends them out.

He sends them out just as he was sent by his father.

That is what disciples do,
that is the mission of a disciple.

Go out into the world.

Go and be disciples!

Remember the instruction Jesus gave to them before his death?

Go out and show the world that you are my disciples!

Love one another!

Serve one another!

But someone missed the party.

One unfortunate disciple wasn't in the room that day.

Poor Thomas.

He gets such a bad rap.

Thomas, the doubter, Thomas wasn't there.

He doesn't believe what the others are telling him

and declares that unless he touches the wounds,

he will not believe.

So Jesus shows up again.

Jesus shows up and gives Thomas what he needs to believe.

Jesus offers himself to Thomas,

knowing what he needs for faith.

Jesus does not spend his time shaming Thomas or mocking him.

He offers himself, his very body as the evidence for which Thomas is looking.

From the text we don't know if Thomas actually did reach out

and run his fingers across the nail pierced hands.

We don't know if he really did put his hand out

and touch the side that the spear pierced.

What we do know is that whatever Jesus did, it was enough.

Seeing the scars,

being in the presence of the risen Christ,

Thomas cries out, "My Lord and my God!"

The greatest declaration in John's gospel.

But not all will have that same chance Thomas had.

Not every believer will be given that opportunity

to see those **wounded hands**

and be given the chance to see the pierced side.

And yet those scars are named as what convinces the disciples during each appearance.

Both the disciples gathered on the day of the resurrection

and Thomas a week later,

recognized Jesus as their Lord after seeing his scars.

Friends, we have a wounded Savior.

We have a God who chose to limit himself and take on our wounds.

God limited himself for us.

We all know that God is infinite, right?

God is infinite in his love,

infinite in power,

beyond time and beyond space, He is the creator of all.

It reminds me of something my much-loved theology professor used to say.

He would frequently confound us lowly seminary students

by saying time and space are human problems, not God problems.

If you think about that for more than thirty seconds

it will make your head spin or maybe just mine.

Time and space are human problems, not God problems.

God created the natural order, including time and space.

God created them and God orders them

– just like the reading from Ecclesiastes says.

So that's our issue, not God's.

He created it.

He's in charge of it.

But throughout history, in our scriptures

we repeatedly hear stories of God

choosing to limit himself and join creation in time and space.

Most evidently, we experience this in the life of Jesus Christ.

Through his own son,

God chose to confine himself to time and space.

God chose to become a part of his creation.
And in so doing, Jesus Christ bears the wounds
that mark the effects of that which impacts all of us.
We can say without a doubt,
that we have a God who appreciates the limits of life.
We have a God who appreciates our struggles.
And a God who knows that time is limited and precious.

And as God's children,
those who have been joined to that wounded Savior
by being joined to his death and resurrection in the waters of baptism;
we are called to be a part of what God is doing
in our human problems of time and space.
When Jesus appeared to the disciples,
he sent them on a mission.
He sent them out with his peace
to continue his work in drawing people to the kingdom of God.
He sent them out knowing that they were limited by time,
but empowering them to use all their gifts, including time.

Time is one of the few assets that we are all given.
Every day each of us is given an equal amount of this asset.
We can't buy more time and we can't sell any extra time.
But, we can be stewards of our time.
And by stewarding our time,
by organizing our days and our weeks,

we honor God by using this gift that he has given each of us wisely.¹

But when we are over-busy or even under-busy

we can feel like we're stuck in a rut and unable to free ourselves.

Sounds almost like the impact of sin, huh.

But before we can proceed with diving in and changing things,

it can be helpful to know where we are with time.

So, maybe a good place to start in stewarding our time

is to identify how we spend it.

Maybe as we reflect on Jesus' resurrection and his mission to send out disciples,

we can spend the next week understanding our time.

What if we all took the time to write in our planners or in a journal

capturing exactly how we used our time every day?

As we are doing that at the end of our day,

we can think about what our goals are.

Maybe spend time in prayer, asking God for direction and guidance.

Then after one week,

perhaps we can look back at how we used our time

and see if that is suiting our goals

– maybe these goals are for a big life change,

just to ease a little bit of stress,

maybe to make space for a hobby,

give of our time to those in need,

spend more time with the family,

or dare I say, spend a little more time with God in devotion or in worship.

So after a week and a bit of reflection,

we might find some activities that aren't serving where God is sending us.

¹ Many of these thoughts were inspired by the book, *Simple Life* by Thom Rainer & Art Rainer, published by B&H Publishing Group and LifeWay Research: Nashville, TN (2009), pp. 1-96.

Here comes the hard part.

We may need to let one or two good things go.

This can be difficult for us.

But it may be exactly what we need to do for ourselves,

our relationships with others and our relationship with God.

Letting one or two things go may be the key

in freeing up time to align ourselves with God's call

in our lives and our own needs.

In addition to letting one or two things go,

we also may find that we are called to take on one or two things.

That is, if time and priorities allow.

But then we are all in different places in our lives

and letting things go or taking things on

may or may not be appropriate for everyone.

In that regard, I hope some of you were able to mill around a bit in the gathering space and narthex on your way into worship.

Thanks to the senior ministry team and Pastor Hoffsis,

Epiphany hosted Seniorfest for a second time.

In the gathering space, we had an art show

in memory of Epiphany disciple, Dan Johnson.

Each piece in the show was created by a participant in Seniorfest.

Walking through, I couldn't believe how talented

some people in this congregation are.

My goodness, what a delight!

And what time must have been given to these gorgeous creations.

Time, that precious asset given to craft works of art

that offer the rest of us an opportunity to reflect,

be drawn in and admire the beauty of God's creation

and God's gifts of talent.

For me walking through the art show was a reminder that time is precious.

Time is only guaranteed for today.

How we use our time honors the creator of time.

Luckily, he also encourages us on the path by joining us in time.

And we are fortunate to have a whole host of faith stories

that remind us of God joining us on the journey,

encouraging us in faith and like the story of Thomas,

God showing up and giving us what we need

to get us on his mission.

You know, I think the writer of our gospel passage today

may have had an appreciation for time.

The story about Thomas and all the other stories about Jesus

captured in this gospel are written for faith,

so that we may believe

– and the writer states it right there in verses 30 and 31.

He even goes on to say in the last chapter of John

that if everything about Jesus had been written down

there aren't enough books in existence to capture them.

But you know, if we had all those books,

we wouldn't have time to read them all.

Instead, through stories like this one about Thomas,

God is giving us just what we need.

We need stories that reassure us that Jesus shows up.

We need encouragement,

to be reminded that we have received the Holy Spirit,

that we have been sent on a mission as Christ's disciples.

And we need to hear again the urgency in that.

We have been given the gift of faith – and the gift of time.

A limited amount to explore the world God has created,

to grow in faith,

to develop relationships

and to love one another.

What a precious gift.