20th Sunday after Trinity
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IN NOMINE JESU

Ephesians 5: 15, 16 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

REDEEM THE TIME

There are two words in the Greek language which we have translated in English with the single word "TIME." The one Greek word is chronos - from which we get our word chronology. Chronological time is just one thing after another - one day after the next - generations come and go - each one is like the next. You can measure it with the clock..... This is not the word that is used in our text.

The other Greek word for time - the one which is used here - is kairos. You can't measure kairological time with a clock. Kairological time is HIGH TIME - due time - when your wife nudges you in the middle of the night and says, Harry, wake up - I think it's time - we had better go to the hospital. It is MOMENTOUS TIME - with decisiveness added to it. Something is at stake! Yesterday would be too early - tomorrow would be too late - THE TIME IS NOW! It is the decisive, crucial, critical time - the momentous time - the opportune time. Let's keep this in mind as we examine the admonition of our text: LOOK CAREFULLY THEN HOW YOU WALK, NOT AS UNWISE MEN BUT AS WISE, REDEEMING THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.

The apostle says we are to REDEEM the time - or BUY UP the time - like a housewife who finds an item on sale and buys up a lot of it. But the question naturally arises: From what? From what are we to BUY UP THE TIME? Let me try to answer that question by pointing out first of all what it is not!

I don't think the apostle is saying that we are to buy the time back from the past - to somehow reclaim the past - to redeem the time that is past and gone. I don't think the text is saying that. We could easily be misled into thinking that the text is telling us to use time while it is present because at any moment it is going to be past, and once it is past it is irretrievable - as though the thing to avoid is letting it get into the past without our having exploited it properly: MAKE THE MOST OF IT WHILE IT IS HERE! Who doesn't yearn to do just this? In a kind of self-pity we are all inclined to join in the lament of the Hindu hymn: LIKE THE SNOW UPON THE RIVER; HERE FOR A DAY, THEN GONE FOREVER. People my age

say: I wouldn't like to be a day younger - I wouldn't like to be a boy again - I wouldn't like to have to come up all the way again through this clumsy business of youth, and young manhood - NOW IS JUST PERFECT. But you wish the time could stand still here - you wish that the present wouldn't become past, because you are not so sure that it is going to keep on getting better, and better, and better - it might go down hill from here on out..... Well, I don't think that this is what the text is saying we are to buy the time back from - from the past.

Now I don't mean that the N.T. doesn't have an answer to that aspect of the time problem. It does - it is all over the N.T. - it is all over Ephesians as a matter of fact - and the simplest word to the solution of that problem, reclaiming the past, is the word FORGIVENESS - AS GOD IN CHRIST FORGAVE YOU. And that is what forgiveness means: Forgiveness really is not forgetting the past, but undoing it - cancelling the sin in His own body on the Cross - transplanting it into the Cross and Resurrection of Christ and annihilating it - swallowing it up. My point is this: Just because the human heart is so engrossed by the fleetingness of time, we might be inclined to think that this must be what the apostle has in mind here - namely, Make the most of your time while it is here, because by tomorrow it will be gone. Well, I don't think he is saying that at all.

There is something else that this text is not saying. Wouldn't it be tempting to think that what the apostle means here is this - namely, that we are to buy up the time from what is trivial, unimportant, insignificant - from frittering it away on what is superficial and shallow - all the inconsequential little things that fill up our time. And how do you buy it up then? You buy it up by doing what is not trivial - but important, significant, worthwhile. A man might be quite satisfied with the time that he had, if he could spend it on what was important and worthwhile. Here are 5 important things that he has to do today - and it isn't that he did 3 of them and when the day was over 2 were left undone - that isn't the worst of it. The worst of it is that he had 5 important things to do today and he didn't even get to the 1st one because he had 10 unimportant things to do first. The things that we do first are not the most important things, but the things that

get done first are so often the most INSISTENT THINGS - and WHAT GRIPES YOU MORE? I suppose the classic illustration of that from modern life is the telephone. You can be in the midst of doing what is truly important - helping some poor soul, writing a sermon, preparing for a class, counselling someone who needs your help and every minute of it — and the phone rings. But the phone is by no means the only example. You could, I suppose, decline an assignment for some job or some committee with pretty good grace if you could say, Well, I'm going to be out of town on that day - or, I have a previous appointment with somebody. But you couldn't turn it down for any such reason as this: I have an 11 year old boy at home who needs his father home sometimes in the evening - or I need some time to think. Who would have the nerve to offer such an excuse? The things that get done first are the most INSISTENT THINGS, not the most important. And the Christian Gospel certainly has something to say to this problem, but I DON'T THINK that that is what this text is saying we are to buy the time back from - namely, from TRIVIALITY and SECONDARY THINGS.

Well, what is it saying? FROM WHAT ARE WE TO BUY UP THE TIME? I think the rest of the sentence explains it: REDEEM THE TIME, FOR THE DAYS ARE EVIL. In other words, we are to BUY UP THE TIME so that the TIME DOESN'T TURN INTO EVIL DAYS. In opposite contrast to this evil aternative there is a phrase which runs like a golden thread throughout the whole epistle - and that is IN CHRIST, or IN THE LORD, or IN THE SPIRIT, or FOR THE LORD, or FOR THE LORD'S SAKE. To REDEEM THE TIME FROM EVIL DAYS means that the man who is in the Lord, or who acts in the Lord, IS or ACTS for the same purpose for which Christ died and rose again. And that is just what this whole text is saying: DON'T BE FOOLS, BUT MAKE CERTAIN WHAT THE WILL OF THE LORD IS - DON'T GET DRUNK, WHICH IS DEBAUCHERY, BUT RATHER BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT - ADDRESSING ONE ANOTHER WITH PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, SINGING AND MAKING MELODY IN YOUR HEART TO THE LORD - GIVING THANKS FOR ALL THINGS IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST TO GOD THE FATHER - BE SUBJECT TO ONE ANOTHER OUT OF REVERENCE FOR CHIRST. And then there are the admonitions that immediately follow this text - to husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters.

And here you find the whole connection of BEING IN CHRIST again and again in one form or another - namely, that when a man is a husband in the Lord, or a woman is a wife in the Lord, or they are parents in the Lord, or children in the Lord, or when they make melody to the Lord - they ARE and DO these things for the same redemptive purpose for which Christ died and breached the dividing wall of hostility through the blood of the Cross in order to RECONCILE ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF.

What does this mean then for BUYING UP THE TIME? It means that IN CHRIST every moment is momentous. Someone has said concerning teenagers: They live as though every moment had the urgency of a telegram and the immediacy of a toothache. It is something like that for the Christian too. All time - even though it is chronologically measurable by clocks and calendars - is MOMENTOUS TIME! It is KAIROS - not because it is here today and gone tomorrow and you had better use it while it is around. Any noble pagan knows that. That's not what is decisive about it - that's not what is at stake. Nor is it that it could easily be wasted on trivia, on insignificant and unimportant events. The KAIROLOGICAL, MOMENTOUS character of it is that the alternative is that you either live out your time IN CHRIST or you do not - and not to is to surrender it, forfeit it, or, as we say, to kill time, or waste it, or lose it.

One of the implications of this is that a man who is not in Christ might do very important things and kill time disasterously. He can govern states - he can dispense medicine, find a cure for cancer - he can circumnavigate the earth - he can raise children - he can take off an afternoon and play touch football with his children in the park - he can do all of these marvelous things - but if they are not done in Christ, for the same redemptive, reconciling purpose for which He lived and died - he has killed the time.

The other side of it is that people who are doomed to trivial things - the man who does nothing else all day but make sure there are only 32 threads to every screw he turns out on a lathe - or who mops floors all day, or a mother who sits home and spends a whole hour looking through a Sear's Roebuck Catelogue trying to decide whether this kind of children's underwear is better but cheaper than the

other kind — that these people too can buy up the time - that because they are do these seemingly trivial things IN CHRIST, they are no longer trivial, but they are signfficant and important - perhaps more grandly signficant than they realize.

This is not to say, however, that it makes little difference what a Christian does or how he behaves. The text does not say: Get drunk if you want to as long as you get drunk in the Lord - then you will be buying back the time. No! It says DON'T GET DRUNK, and it says, DO DO SO-AND-SO - DO ADDRESS ONE ANOTHER WITH PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS - GIVE THANKS - MAKE MELODY IN YOUR HEART - BE SUBJECT TO ONE ANOTHER. So it does make a difference how you spend your time. But behavior alone is not enough. The text does not say either, As long as you sing and address one another with psalms and so forth, whether you do it IN THE LORD or not is immaterial - you'll still be buying back the time. Not at all. Behavior is important, but what gives everything significance and a basis is that it is done IN CHRIST and FOR HIS PURPOSE..... It is for this that we must pray: O GOD, HELP EVERY ONE OF US TO LIVE OUT EVERY MINUTE OF EVERY DAY IN CHRIST AND SO TO REDEEM THE TIME, FOR THE DAYS ARE EVIL. Amen.