

My first job, after moving to the United States, was a hefty commute from the Seattle neighborhood where we lived. Way west of I5, I had to get through the neighborhoods to the freeway, then through the city, before heading east, crossing Lake Washington, getting on another freeway and ending up in a town about 15 miles east of Seattle. It really wasn't that far, but in almost stopped traffic the entire way, the commute could easily take me an hour and a half, or more, one way. If it rained (or heaven-forbid snowed) that journey time could easily double. This was a significant chunk of my weekday life for about 6 years.

In those days, I found inching along in brutal traffic to be almost unbearably stressful, largely because I spent many of those hours tormenting myself with all the things I could or should be doing; the fact this drive was a "waste of time" was what really caused me the biggest problem, my stress was bound up in the way I'd come to think about time – what constituted a good use of time and what was a flagrant waste of time.

I hadn't thought about that commute in years, but was reminded of it last week when my oldest was in town for a visit. Thom is 21, finishing up his junior year in college, juggling 3 jobs and a full course load, he's struggling with time. He is stressed and frustrated at his lack of time, and trying to figure out what's the best use of his time was a theme of our conversations and is the source of a great deal of the pressure he's experiencing. A combination of feeling forced to spend time in a certain way, feeling unproductive, or lacking the freedom to fill the time that's available in the way he wants, through it all runs a feeling that time is limited, scarce, and it's being used up in all the wrong ways.

For many of us, our relationship with time is a strained one for much of our lives. Do we have enough time, can we ever have enough time? For the time we have, are we spending it in the ways we want or should, saving it wherever we can, investing it wisely? Maybe we have too much time and might feel we're not using as best we could, not filling it with the right things or giving it to the people or tasks that deserve it most. Time-stress is all around us, it's part of the culture we all live in.

Perhaps that's because for many, many generations in this dominant culture of the western world, time and money have been conjoined: time is *for* the making of money, *for* getting stuff done, time is for work, for being productive. We commonly describe our relationship with time in the language of currency, how we spend it or save it; and the very real material, economic concerns we may have can become inextricably inter-linked with the very real and stressful feeling of a lack of time.

Time seems to be something easily understood, flowing steadily and unstoppably, it seems, from the past and into the future; our decision-making can be heavily influenced by our knowing we only have a certain amount of it, and it will run out. But time's really not quite that simple.

Our relationship with time is more complex than the regular, steady beat of the clock would suggest, our perception of time is changeable. It's likely we can all remember days, especially as children, when time passed unbearably slowly, or later as adults meeting a friend's now full-grown child we can feel as though decades have just evaporated. Psychologists and physicists affirm that time is not absolute, it's not a fundamental property of the universe¹ – but that's a fact of science that's unlikely to change the way I relate to time.

¹ For a fascinating read, see Carlo Rovelli's "The Order of Time" (Riverhead Books, 2018)

It's only been through my faith that my learned, enculturated understanding of time has been most profoundly challenged. Not only is my learned experience of time often disrupted in prayer, or during the liturgy, but the idea of eternity, the mystery of eternal life, is woven right through the Christian faith – Christ's Resurrection is a profound challenge to the conventional perception of time, and it points confidently to eternity. The promise of eternal life is something for every Christian to take seriously; the truth of it, something to shake up every Christian's relationship to time.

Gathered around Jesus, in today's Gospel reading, are some of his closest friends: Martha, who is serving, using her time with Jesus at this meal practically, getting the jobs done, taking care of her friends' needs, getting the food on the table. I imagine Judas impatiently pacing the room - some biblical scholars believe Judas Iscariot was a zealot, one of a group of Jewish people who vehemently opposed Roman occupation and advocated for a violent uprising against them – perhaps Judas wanted to use this time, time that was quickly running out, to make plans, to *do* something, rather than sitting around, eating and weeping. Mary seems to be at ease not being “productive,” she claims a spot on the floor and pays close attention to the one she knows she is soon to lose, she is focused only on being present to Jesus. And at the table is Lazarus, brought back from the dead, we know nothing about what he's thinking or doing, yet he is present, and his very life challenges everything we might think we understand about life, death, and the passage of time.

The various aspects of the Christian life are represented in this scene:

there's hospitality and feeding the community; the redistribution of money, concrete action to change the material situation of those in need; new life in Christ (as represented by Lazarus); and, there's doing nothing more than being fully, bodily present to God. In his rebuke to Judas, Jesus is creating essential space in the Christian Way for the vital "unproductive" use of time.

This is the very essence of Sabbath, the sanctification of time - and, for me, it's linked here to a jar of costly nard, so expensive it could have been sold for a huge amount of money. In this Gospel reading, I hear reference to the "high price" of time, the terrible waste of not using precious time for something more productive. There will always be work to do, for sure, I hear Jesus say, and plenty of it, but if we don't intentionally dedicate some of our time for the 'full-body/heart, mind and senses' experience of being present to God, the sanctifying of time itself, we risk getting so entirely wrapped up in the stuff of the world that we become distorted by its pressures and stresses, absolutely absorbed as we can so easily get in all that needs to be done and how little time we have to do it ... this will haul us away from God, and keep us from fullness of life.

Time is not *for* the measuring of what we can do, change, produce, accomplish, achieve. Time, in this world and the next, is of God. Through Jesus we're offered a life-bringing, life-giving and counter-cultural way to perceive time, to understand it and live within it; and, to trust that, to embrace it and allow it to transform our being and doing in this world of unrelenting stuff to do we must, from time to time, choose the experience of presence over the constant demand of getting it done. Stopping to be fully present to God is no indulgent frippery, it is the way to freedom. And getting free, that changes everything. Amen.

