

## **This Is The Day** (Psalm 118:1-9, 19-29; Mark 12:1-11; I Peter 2:1-12)

"Dead Man Walking." That's what prison guards and inmates say as a prisoner makes his way to the execution chamber. "Dead Man Walking." Our Older Testament reading for today is a warning to us to not live our lives so that the same phrase describes us.

Certainly, if not we ourselves, all around us, there are people who could be described this way--people who have lost hope, given up, shut down--people who wake up depressed, only to drag themselves through another day. Such people can be heard saying, "Life is one bad thing after another, and then you die."

The person who wrote Psalm 118 had every reason to feel like a dead man walking himself. He was in distress. He had enemies who hated him. Life was difficult. Nonetheless, he proclaimed, "I shall not die, but I shall live." And he was even able to sing and encourage others--us--to join him in singing, "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!" "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

It's so easy to overlook "this" day--the current day. Oftentimes we can't see the present day for focusing on past days. When we've lost someone we love, it's easy for us to allow our grief to keep us focused on the past.

I read about a man who lost his eyesight. He tried all sorts of remedies, but nothing worked. So he decided to try a chiropractor. Wonder of wonders, under the care of the chiropractor, his sight came back. A month later, he returned to the chiropractor, and the chiropractor asked, "What's wrong? Can't you see?" The man answered, "My sight is still good. But now I've lost my memory. I forget everything--where I've been, what I've done, what I went after, just everything!" After examining the man, the chiropractor said, "This is the strangest thing that I have ever seen. I've never seen anything quite like it. I can give you a treatment that will restore your memory, but if I do that, you'll lose your sight again. So, would you rather have your memory or your sight? Do you want the treatment to restore your memory?" The man thought a minute and then said, "No, sir. I'd rather see where I'm going than remember where I've been."

Now that's a wise decision, isn't it?

Nonetheless, if we focus too far ahead, too much on the future, again, we miss the present. If we work too single-mindedly for a future goal, be it a degree, a position, a certain amount of money, retirement, when we work too single-mindedly for any of these things, we can miss the present. Similarly we live our lives afraid of the future, we let the future take all our attention and energy, so that, again, we miss the present.

Helen Mallicoat expressed it really well in something she wrote for Hallmark Cards. She wrote, "I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly my Lord was speaking. 'My name is I Am.' He paused. I waited. He continued. 'When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I WAS. When you live in the future with its problems and fears, it is hard. My name is not I WILL BE. When you live in this moment, it is not hard. I am here. My name is I AM.'" (Taken from LISTEN FOR THE LORD by Helen Mallicoat (C) 1977 Hallmark Cards, Inc., Kansas City, Missouri SBN 87529-519-3)

A man shared with his students a prayer that he said was the secret of his joy and success. This was his prayer: *This is the beginning of a new day. Today comes only once and will never return. God has given me this twenty-four hours to use as I will. I can waste it or use it for good. What I do today is important because I am exchanging a day of my life for it. I know that the real cost of a thing is the amount of my life I spend obtaining it. When tomorrow comes this day will be gone forever, leaving in its place something I have traded for it. I must not forget the price I paid for it. I want it to be gain, not loss; good not evil; success not failure. In order that I shall not regret the price I paid for it, today I must do my best, make it useful, profitable, and successful.*

It's been said that every morning, our generous God, who loves us, gives us 86,400 seconds of time, or 1,414 minutes, or 24 hours. Nothing can be saved and carried over to the next day. From sunrise to sunrise we have a precisely determined amount of time. We can walk through the day as dead men, or we can make the most of the day.

And if we want to make the most of the day, there are certain things that we would be wise to do each day.

First, we would be wise to make a conscious effort to spend time with God each day. God wants to spend time with us each day. He wants to be in relationship with us. He has a will for our lives. He has blessings he wants to bestow upon us.

When the psalmist sought God in the present, he found him. The present day became a precious gift, for it held the presence of God. When we spend time with God, we too will find him, and what blessings he will bestow upon us each day. He'll comfort us, encourage us, give us strength, give us hope, help us with the decisions we need to make.

Not too long ago, I was feeling overwhelmed by everything I needed to do to help get my mother in a better place. I didn't see how I could possibly do it all. But then I kept reminding myself that I didn't have to do it all and make all the decisions by myself. I kept repeating Psalm 37. Whenever I'd start dragging, dreading, feeling overwhelmed, walking like a dead man, I'd repeat Psalm 37: "Trust in the Lord, and do good...take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act...wait patiently for him..." Time and time again, I was amazed at the energy and ideas I had and how everything just fell into place. My negative feelings were replaced with positive feelings--feelings of gratitude, freedom from worry, and peace. Making that conscious effort to keep inviting God into my life made those difficult days actually happy days, cause I felt God's presence with me so acutely.

I read about a woman in a church who was so excited to be a Christian. She had a shady past and had pretty much hit rock bottom when a friend reached out to her and brought her to church. The church members welcomed her warmly and loved her into the circle of their love and God's love. She started going to church faithfully. She joined a wonderful Sunday School class. She began studying the Bible daily. She started praying regularly and in the process accepted Jesus as her Lord. She realized for the very first time in her life that God loved her, even her! She came to understand that even though she'd done all those bad things in her earlier life, God still loved her, forgave her, accepted her, valued her, treasured

her. She was constantly brought to tears of joy by that "Amazing Grace," and she committed herself to God heart and soul. She told her pastor, "I'm so excited to be a Christian, that I've got a strong case of the 'can't help its.'" Spending time with God every day changed this woman from a dead man walking to a fully alive, vigorous, joyful child of God.

Spending time with God each day changes us.....Just as spending 30 minutes every day in physical exercise gets us in better physical shape, so too spending time with God each day gets us and keeps us in better spiritual, emotional, and mental shape

Years ago Merv Griffin, on his talk show, asked Charlton Heston if any of the characters he had portrayed in his religious movies had changed his spiritual outlook. Heston thought for a moment and then said, "Playing Moses (in *The Ten Commandments*) changed my spiritual outlook." When Merv Griffin said, "Why?" Charlton Heston replied, "Well, Merv, you can't walk barefoot down Mt. Sinai and be the same person you were when you went up." Similarly, we can't spent time with God and be the same person we were before we spent time with God.

Spending time with God may seem to be such a small thing, but a small difference can be big difference. For example: at 211°, water is just hot water; however, with one more degree, at 212°, it becomes boiling water. One degree difference can create steam with enough power to move a train weighing several tons. With that extra degree that comes from spending time with God, we can move from "dead man walking" to being joyfully alive.

In addition to spending time with God, if we want to make the most of each day, a second thing we would be wise to do is to make a conscious effort to open our ears and our eyes to the wonders around us. This helps us become even more joyfully alive--alive to what's going on around us in God's creation.

This week when I was driving to church, far up ahead I saw something large in the middle of the road. I slowed down, and when I got closer, I could tell that it was an owl, standing upright in the middle of the road. That owl looked at me, and I looked at him. I sat there, only about 3 yard from the owl, before he turned his head away from me and flew to a nearby tree. All day I felt the specialness of those moments. I felt blessed by those

moments, in awe of God's creation. I had a little livelier step the rest of the day. What wonders are all around us--if, as Jesus said, we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Each day can be joyful because of the wonders God shows us.

Thirdly, if we want to make the most of the day, we would be wise to look for ways to help others. I read of a pastor's four-year-old daughter who was in the back seat of the family car, having a good old time singing to herself. The song she was singing made her parents chuckle. It was, "It's not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, oh, Lord, standing in the need of PRAISE." We all do need praise, encouragement. And when we praise or encourage someone else, it adds joy--life--to our own lives. The same thing is true of showing others kindness....and expressing gratitude to others.

There was a businessman who suffered an emotional breakdown. He was definitely a dead man walking. He was so depressed that he had no energy and no enthusiasm for life. He went to a counselor, but this didn't seem to help him. Then one day, a friend asked him, "When was the last time you singled out someone who has been gracious to you or influenced you and expressed your appreciation?" When the man went home that evening, he thought about the question, and for the first time in 20 years, he thought of his high school English teacher. She'd taken an interest in him. She'd made him feel as if he might be worth something after all. So that night, he wrote her a simple letter. Three days later, he received a reply. This long-retired school teacher wrote, "My eyes are blinded with tears as I write. You are the first student in all my career who has ever written me a letter to express thanks. I will keep it and treasure it as long as I live." With her letter in hand, he thought of someone else. So he wrote another letter, and then, he wrote another. And guess what? One day he realized that he was happy and glad to be alive. Offering others forgiveness has the same invigorating effect on our lives as well.

There's a little poem, perhaps you've heard, that goes like this:  
Have you made someone happy,  
or made someone sad?  
What did you do  
with the day that you had?  
God gave it to you

to do just as you would,  
Did you do what was wicked, or  
do what was good?  
Did you hand out a smile,  
or just give them a frown,  
Did you lift someone up-or push  
someone down?  
Did you lighten some load or some  
progress impede,  
Did you look for a rose or just  
gather a weed?  
Did you trust in the Lord or stop  
and say "no,"  
Did you come to the Savior or say  
"I won't go?"  
What did you do  
with your beautiful day,  
God gave it to you.  
Did you throw it away?

A preacher named Carl B. Rife (Bumper Sticker Religion, Carl B. Rife, CSS Publishing Company, Inc, 1993, 1-5567-3600-2) wrote about attending a meeting in which the speaker said pretty much the same thing, but the way he put it was: "This is the day that the Lord has made. Don't blow it!" Commenting on this, Rife said, "This is a day laden with opportunities, a day to live, to love, to serve, a day to create, a day to celebrate. Don't blow it."

When we get up every morning, let's remember to make the most of each day--to spend time with God; to spend time being open to God's wonders around us; and to spend time helping others. How easy and natural then we will find it to be to join the psalmist in declaring, "This is the day that the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it!"

-- Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; May 30, 2010