

Isaiah 61:10-62:3(ESV) ¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations. ¹For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. ²The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. ³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Psalms 111:1(ESV) ¹Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. ²Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. ³Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. ⁴He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and merciful. ⁵He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. ⁶He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations. ⁷The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; ⁸they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. ⁹He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name! ¹⁰The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

Luke 2:22-40(ESV) ²²And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." ²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." ³³And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." ³⁶And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

He the Source, the Ending He

Galatians 4:4-7(ESV) ⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

It is no surprise to us that we are quickly running out of time in this year. Soon it will be the end of 2020 and we will move on to 2021.

That time is *relevant*, of enormous impact, is beyond debate. Often it dictates when we eat, sleep, work, and play. Many of us are inordinately dependent on our clocks and wristwatches to get us through the day. On the other hand, time is also *relative*, depending on one’s perspective and situation in life. There are those who have much too much time on their hands and the moments of each day pass at a snail’s pace. I am referring to the lonely, the isolated, the imprisoned, the fearful, the invalid, the sickly, and the depressed.

By contrast, there are those who believe they have all the time in the world: time to pursue their dreams, to raise their families, to build their nest eggs, and, sadly, to give proper attention to their spiritual lives. A mature Christian in one congregation once observed that people seem to be more involved in Bible study later in life, when they “have more time.” Unfortunately, this person may be exactly right. But that person is also wrong. You see, we all have the same amount of time each day, each week, each year. The patterns and priorities we set for ourselves for the way we use our time in the prime of life provide a context for how we spend our time later in life. Most of us find time for whatever is important to us—whatever we consider of value.

Somewhere between those who have too much time and those who believe they have all the time in the world are those who have no time. Some people, like you and me, are pulled in many different simultaneous directions—each of which requires time. We may be trying to find enough time for our vocations, our leisure activities, our marriages, our families, and our church. If this description fits you and me, we likely find comfort in the psalmist’s words, “The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore” (Psalm 121:8). This may be especially true for each of us when we find ourselves “coming and going,” not knowing where or how or when to expend our priorities.

Thus, during these last days of 2020, we take time to place time into the timetable of our timeless God.

Our text is Galatians 4:4-7: “⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

“*When the fullness of time had come . . .*” With God, nothing is haphazard or happenstance. God has a time for everything, and everything God plans happens on time, especially God’s plan for

our redemption. So it was that a little over 2,000 years ago, God decided that it was time—the right time, the fullness of time—for the Savior to be born—a timeless God entering a time-driven world.

Why then? Why not years earlier? Why didn't God send a Savior to deliver His chosen people from Egyptian oppression? Because, perhaps, one and a half millennia later when the Savior did come, God's people were under a more insidious form of slavery—one with eternal consequences. They had become subject to the expectations and exploitations of religious leaders like the Pharisees, who exulted themselves as exemplars of the faith, who deluded others into believing that their self-serving piety pleased God, whose religion became synonymous with rituals and rites and the rigidity of rules.

There is no greater bondage of our will and spirit than seeking to satisfy God. There is no greater spiritual enslavement than to believe that we oversee our eternal destiny. If, even for a split second, we believe that our relationship with the Lord and the fate of our salvation is dependent on the type of person we are—what kind of father or mother, husband or wife, pastor or farmer; how good, or effective, or productive, or kind—we would be more oppressed than the lowliest, most subservient slave.

That is why the Father sent the Son into the world in the fullness of time; namely, to redeem us from the curse and burden of the Law and place it squarely on the shoulders of Jesus. He, born of a woman—fully human and fully divine—was also born “under” the Law. He kept the Law perfectly—not the superficial mandates penned by the Pharisees—but the letter and spirit of God's holy, piercing, and penetrating Law. It is impossible for us to keep the Law. We cannot even get past the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods,” let alone the other nine without crying out, “I am guilty!” Christ's keeping of the Law is an imperative part of His act of salvation.

Yet even that was not sufficient to meet the criteria established by God for our salvation. The only Son of the Father also had to pay the price of sin's consequence! And so, He did, on the cross of Calvary, taking our sins upon Himself, literally and spiritually dying our death.

As we know and believe and confess, our sin and His death could not hold Him as a slave in bondage. Aha, Easter! Resurrection! New life! And, through Christ's holy life, sacrificial death, and powerful resurrection, we are called sons and daughters of almighty God. We have been given the incredible invitation to call the God who created time in the first place, “*Abba*, Father,” “Dear Father.” For if we are God's children, then we are also God's heirs, heirs of life forever in heaven.

This message is simple and straightforward Law and Gospel, sin and grace, bondage and freedom, supremely relevant for all generations, for all years, for all time. For it transforms the temporal into the eternal. It puts into heavenly perspective everything with which we concern ourselves during this brief time that we are citizens on earth. Frankly, I cannot conceive of a more appropriate way to begin or end the day than by being assured that we are God's children, beloved of the Father.

This sermon's theme is a line in a hymn normally sung throughout Christmastide, yet appropriate for all seasons. It takes our speck of life here on earth and places it within the framework of the unimaginable, incomprehensible expanse of God.

“Of the Father’s love begotten Ere the worlds began to be, He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending He. Of the things that are, that are, that have been, and that future years shall see Evermore and evermore” (LSB 384:1).

“He the source, the ending He” of *life* itself. Christ the Lord has been with us since before we were born and shall be with us when our time on this earth comes to an end. And for certain, Christ is with us now and throughout the days ahead. There is no ending for our lives, for—remember—we inherit *eternity*. Yet as we reflect and ponder on past decades, even on all our life, we see the hand of God upon us. A rhetorical, yet spiritual and relevant question: Can we dare enter a new day without an ever-deepening relationship with the eternal Christ?

“He the source, the ending he” of *love* itself. There is no greater love than that which the Father gives us through the Son. There is no greater love than that which receives us and welcomes us, not on our terms, but through God’s grace and mercy. That we are the children of God and may call upon God in the most endearing of terms, “*Abba, Father,*” is not what we merit, but, rather, it is a profound display of God’s love.

“He the source, the ending He” of what is, what has been, and what will be . . . “evermore and evermore.”