

Rev Tim Perkins
Nov 11th 2021

"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."
Psalm 90: 12

Dear Friends,

I am writing this letter today having just taken time to stop and observe the national two minute silence to mark Remembrance Day. I took the opportunity to look back in my files to see what I wrote to you a year ago and was so struck by how miserably I have failed to listen to my own advice in the last year that I am going to borrow from that letter for this one – not in it's entirety, but bits and pieces.

The words quoted above are taken from a Psalm ascribed to Moses and in my Bible are titled: "A *prayer of Moses the man of God.*" It is a fascinating Psalm because to our modern ears, in parts it presents an image of God which is difficult for us to hear or understand. In earlier verses it describes God as being above, beyond and before all things and talks of how humanity is "*consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation,*" and how "*all our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.*" Our lives are compared to grass which appears in the morning but by the evening has withered away and died. The context for that of course is the eternal nature of God and God's kingdom.

We perhaps have a different understanding of God today and prefer to focus more on the concept of a loving God than an angry or wrathful God. And certainly, the message of Scripture as a whole, is that the overwhelming love of God embraces and transforms all things – God is making all things new!

But it is this sentence that has grabbed my attention: "*Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*" I wonder what Moses might have been getting at? I think perhaps part of it is about using our time on this earth wisely, not just frittering it away or allowing it to pass us by, but to make the most of it. I think there is a sense of purpose behind these words. It is not just a case of counting off yet another day on this miserable planet (as you might think if you read the first half of the Psalm!) It is more about assessing our lives as a whole and each individual day within them and offering them to God for God's purposes. Teach us to number our days might be interpreted as "*take time to mark time.*"

Perhaps it is the same sentiment that lies behind our Acts of Remembrance this week. We remember those who gave their lives for our freedom, we give thanks for their sacrifice, but we also seek to learn lessons and live differently. Remembrance should lead to reflection and then action.

I hope and pray that in time we will be able to look back and say the same thing about the COP 26 Climate Summit. I hope it will have been a time to take stock and then act in light of what we have learned.

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But what about us? What might it mean for us? Last year I referred to a book I was reading by Archbishop Stephen Cottrell, titled, “*Hit the ground kneeling – seeing leadership differently.*” In it he reflects upon some of the narratives that our world often lives by in relation to leadership. And the first such narrative he tackles is the one that says, “*hit the ground running!*”

I’m sure we all know what he means by that – the sense that the busier we are the more productive we think we will be and the bigger impact we think we will have! Archbishop Stephen suggests that the Christian Gospel challenges that narrative, hence the title of his book, “*Hit the ground...kneeling.*”

The first task of the Christian leader, indeed of each Christian in every aspect of life where they express influence, is to take time and make space. Indeed, he puts it more bluntly than that by saying: “*The first mark of leadership that we can discern from the Christian perspective is this: find time to stop. The leader is sometimes the person who dares to do nothing.*”

Many of us lead such busy lives that we do not have the time to “*number our days,*” to be still, to reflect, to contemplate, to remember, to gaze on the beauty, glory and majesty of God. We do not take time to weigh up options carefully and prayerfully, seek consensus, build coalitions, map out the ground. Instead we “*rush in where angels fear to tread.*” And as such we miss out on gaining the heart of wisdom that such contemplation can develop.

Archbishop Stephen writes: “*The lifestyle guru Stephen Covey tells the instructive story of two men sawing wood. One person works solidly through the day. The other takes a break for ten minutes every hour. At the end of the day the person who has taken the breaks has cut considerably more wood. ‘How can this be?’ asks the other man. ‘Every time I took a break,’ comes the reply, ‘I sharpened my saw.’*”

The approaching season of Advent presents us with the choice of either becoming even more busy with all the preparations for Christmas, or to dedicate some time to stop and wait and prepare for the coming of our Lord. As such the Circuit staff are working on some ideas to help us use Advent wisely. There are three opportunities we wish to offer to you:

Christchurch are having an Advent Day of Prayer on 2nd December. There will be set times of prayer and prayer stations to drop into and a “Prayer and Praise” interactive service in the early evening (hopefully hybrid). It will be focussed the last verse of Maggi Dawn’s advent hymn, *Into the darkness of this world:*

Hope of the ages, God with us,
visit again this broken place,
till all the earth declares your praise
and your great mercies own.
Now let your love be born in us,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.

In our Eastern cluster of churches there will be opportunity to take part in a 3 session course based on the Luke lectionary readings for Advent 2-4 entitled ‘What is God’s good news here and now?’ to run in the first 3 weeks of December. The plan is to run it

in Bramhope on Monday afternoons and at Yeadon on Thursday afternoons. There will also be an online evening version available.

The third option is a four-week course that I am working on titled “Come, thou long-expected Jesus.” We shall be using song and scripture to look at some of the key themes of Advent and to reflect upon the state of our own souls as we prepare for Christmas. The material will be based on a book of the same name by Paul Wesley Chilcote and each week we shall use one of Charles Wesley’s Advent or Christmas carols, alongside scripture and more recent carols to gain a deeper understanding of just what the Incarnation means for us. I shall be offering this opportunity weekly online through Advent for anyone from across the Circuit to join in but session outlines and materials can also be made available to any church groups who wish to meet in person to work through it.

Further details about each of these options will be sent out before the end of November. These courses and groups provide opportunities for us to understand that wisdom and effectiveness in our walk with Christ follow from taking time to be still, to pray, to reflect, to contemplate, to plan well, to respond with care and compassion, to live in such a way that we are indeed learning *“to number our days, that we might gain a heart of wisdom.”*

May the favour of the Lord our God indeed rest upon us and establish the work of our hands.

Every Blessing,

Rev Tim