

Sermon for Christmas Morning

The Rev. Brooks Cato

Phew, I don't know about y'all, but I've been needing today. This has been a weird year. In some ways, it's gone by faster than I can fathom. I don't know how we got all the way to Christmas while my brain stalled out somewhere back in May. But also, May feels like a decade ago, too. Time's one of those things we just plain made up. I mean, yes, time passes whether we've got watches or not, but the strict understanding of periods of time's all made up, and lately I've gotten interested in other ways of tracking time that don't involve picking up my phone to check the clock, getting distracted by an awful headline, doomscrolling for an hour, then tossing my phone down while somehow never registering what time it actually is.

No, I'm talking about the cool stuff that happens whether we're paying attention or not. Geese are a great example of this. One of those moments when my brain got a jolt of a reminder that time goes on in spite of my concerns came all the way back in September-ish. My dog went into the backyard and stood perfectly still, staring at the sky for a good while before my human ears picked up the far-off squawks of a loosely shifting V high above the clouds. No matter what's happening down here, it seems those critters keep to their schedule.

But there's more. We had a campfire up at the land and as it seemed like the night was easing to a close, a friend got up and grabbed a long branch and put it with one end just barely in the fire. She had something she needed to talk through, ya see, and putting that branch just barely in the fire was a way of saying, "we're not done just yet." With no clocks nearby and just the slow melting of wood to ash, the little nudges that moved a little more wood over the flame became our timepiece. And by the end of the night, that timepiece would be no more, never to be used again.

There's a lot of these, right? The wear on the soles of my shoes measures time and energy, too. The grays replacing more and more of my hair. The grays replacing more and more of my dog's hair. The switch from regular to snow tires. The cycle of growing and melting snow drifts, the growing warmth of a new friendship, the growing warmth of baseboard heaters, the growing warmth and impossibly tempting cooling of cookies fresh from the oven. See what I mean? We've got timepieces all around us, and some of them are pretty specialized. You can't convince me, for example, that a minute waiting for one of those cookies to cool is the same length as a minute eating one.

I guess I bring all this time stuff up today in particular because the life we share in Christ, rooted in his birth, is yet another timepiece. It's not so obvious as a watch or even a branch sticking halfway into a fire. But that little child grows, and our stories grow with him. We start in a manger and're led through phenomenal tales. We'll end in a terribly wonderful place in a few months, but even then, the stories keep working on us. We walk that path together three years at a time, one day at a time, one life at a time. It's impossible to really know just what we have done, how those caught in our wake see us, at least it's impossible to know for all we've met. But we know some, those little bits folks take the time to tell us. And I'd like to take the time to tell y'all what I've heard this year about you and this place is nothing short of miraculous. We've grown, not just in numbers, but in reach.

People are learning that if they need help, St. Thomas' is a place that helps. They've learned that if they're afraid, they can come here. That if they're hungry, we will feed them. If they're lost, we'll help them find their way. If they're hopeless, we'll share our hope that this world will be whole someday. While I do like to pat St. Thomas' on the back, this isn't unique to us. At least, it shouldn't be unique to us. This is what churches are supposed to do. We're rooted in the manger, and that tiny body that entered the world last night sustains us as we do the work he's given us to do. And time passes. Pews fill and empty, doors open and close,

wine runs out, wafers appear, you walk in, someone peeks in for the first time, someone departs for the final time, and our little church goes on breathing the life of Christ a little longer.

We count our time in each other here. Our growth, our changes, our lives more and more deeply connected as gray overtakes a few more of us with regular, everyday, miraculous impossibilities and simple geese squawking overhead, that's the world we search for Christ in, and I'm the last person that could tell you how long it'll take before all is made well with that passage of time, but I can tell you this. All shall be well, whether or not we know when. However we measure it, time moseys on. And what it's a gift to mosey on with y'all. Merry Christmas.