

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“Our Days”

Rev. David K. Groth
New Year’s Eve, 2021

“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90.12).

“Your flight has been delayed.” A couple of years back, I was in my seat, all buckled up, carry-on luggage stowed, doors closed, engines revving up, feeling pretty good, spirit already soaring. And then the fateful throttle down, and the captain on the intercom. “Sorry folks. Our flight is going to be delayed. A warning light has been triggered. It will be at least an hour before we know anything.” So, we taxied back to the gate and sat there.

You know what happens: your spirit sags, blood pressure rises, you worry about the connecting flight. And you’re left with a block of time—unplanned, unscheduled time; a disappointing block of time, for sure, but a block of time nonetheless. It was interesting to observe how people chose to use that time. Some got angry, cursed under their breath, told their neighbors how awful this would be. Some started making demands of the flight attendants. Others simply pulled out a book and tried to relax or introduced themselves to the people next to them, or called a friend. They chose to make the best possible use of that empty block of time.

Some used that time to make themselves and others miserable with an adult tantrum. Others used it as best they could.

Ps. 90: Teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Know what time it is in your life. Be aware, be mindful of how short life really is, and then be deliberate and graceful about the time of your life.

At its heart, Psalm 90 is a complaint to God. It starts out with adoration and praise, as most of the psalms do. I teach my confirmands to do the same. Start with praise and thanksgiving before you move into your needs and complaints. Psalm 90 starts with praise. “LORD, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

But then the Psalmist gets down to business. “You turn us back to dust.” Can you hear the resentment? “We’re about as substantial as dry grass. We are consumed by your anger. Our lives are a brief moment to you, but full of trouble for us.” In short, life is so short. Therefore, help us! Help us to number our days so we may gain a wise heart. Help us to appreciate how brief life is and help us to live it out then to its fullest. Teach us to number our days, so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

When we do that, when we count our days, most of us conclude they’re slipping away rather quickly. Most of us experience the law of accelerating time, which is, the older we become the faster the years tick by. We can remember earlier days when a summer vacation from school stretched out ahead like an eternity, almost an endless riot of hot, sunny days: June, July, August. But now, even the summers go by in a flash, and the years tick away as if they were months. “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Given that life is short, we need to live purposefully, intentionally, meaningfully. Not that every moment has to be packed with activity, but we should not waste time as if it had no value. Know the importance of time. Respect time. Receive it as a gift. Treat it as a commodity, as a finite and valuable resource.

The trouble is we humans are foolish. We are unmindful of our limits. We forget we are human; we forget we are mortals. Instead, we think we are gods and we start acting like gods assuming we have all the time in the world. One of the things the true God never has to worry about is finite time, for He is everlasting

to everlasting, without beginning and without end. Wanting to be like God, sometimes we ignore that our days are numbered on earth. We lose our sense of mortality, which makes it easier for us to waste time.

This is important because there is a turf battle going on for your time. Some of you live with incredible numbers of E-mails and voicemails, all demanding replies. Even when on vacation, you cannot get away. But when we are on our death beds, few of us will look back at our lives and say, "I wish I had spent more time at the office" or playing video games, or watching reruns of old gameshows. It's even possible to spend too much time on the kids, a sort of hyper-domestication, days that are centered completely around their calendars, leaving little time for you to be a neighbor, a volunteer, a citizen, a friend, and leaving the kids with too little time just to be kids. Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

You and I have wasted the gift of time, and to the extent we waste time, we waste life itself. If not wasting time, we hoard it for ourselves just like we do with money, and are unable to give it away. But Jesus Christ came to take away the sins of the world, and one of the sins he came to take away is the poor stewardship of time.

I did yesterday what I do every year at this time. I set aside my old calendar from 2021 and got out the new calendar: 2022. The old is tattered around the edges and a bit messy on the inside. I didn't accomplish all that I wanted to, didn't even come close. I didn't always use these days wisely and well. Not everything within was to his honor and glory. Your year was probably like mine. But you know, there's a simple cross on the cover of the calendar, a reminder that Christ has redeemed my year and yours; cleansed it, washed it with His blood and made it holy. As the hymn says, he made it "another year of grace."

This is my calendar for 2022. It's so new and clean, so full of potential. Each of these days is a gift, precious in its own right, a day the Lord has made. Now it's just a matter of using these days wisely and well and to His honor and glory. And what a blessing it is to know that He'll be with us every one of these days. He doesn't take a Sabbath from us or a New Year's Day. He doesn't say, "TGIF I'm outta here." No, every morning when we wake He's already there. Even if at the first moment of [random date] if we turn our souls toward him in prayer, He'll be there, already listening. Every day, he'll have loved us first. And when we drift off to sleep at the end of the day, He'll still be there, like a watchman in the night, like a shepherd, like a Savior.

We live our days under the cross. All the thousands of decisions you and I made, some that were very good, others that were foolish, some were surely evil because we can be that way too . . . all of them were made under the cross. And so we started this night committing the year now ending to His mercy and forgiveness, and commending the New Year to His blessing and love. We can do that because of the cross of Jesus Christ. A calendar with a cross on the front of it is a wonderful reminder that we live our days under the cross, under His grace.

A cross on a forehead reminds us of the same. When you were baptized you were marked by God as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. In 2022, come what may, you will remain one redeemed by Christ the crucified. He's not going to vacate that promise.

One day, there's a good chance your casket or urn will be covered by a cross. The funeral pall is bright white, the color of innocence, and righteousness. But there's also a cross that runs the length of the pall and sends the message, "Jesus died for this one. Jesus has forgiven this one. This one belongs to Him. Those who disagree can take it up with God." In Romans 6, Paul says in holy baptism you were clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness that covered all your sins (vv. 3-5).

So we begin 2022 under the cross, with brand new opportunities for serving our neighbors, brand new opportunities to live with the courage of our Christian convictions, brand new opportunities to exercise Christian love for the world, for our country, our city, our families, our neighbors, and for those God has given us to love. Whatever else it may be, this year to come belongs to Him, even as we belong to him as His redeemed children.

"Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Amen.