

The Appointed Time  
1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Sally and her husband were sitting in their car with their three rambunctious young sons, waiting at a traffic light. As Sally glanced over at the car next to them, she noticed a blissfully happy young mother holding her baby daughter. Looking at her husband, she said, “*As soon as I lose my weight from the last baby, I want to try for a daughter.*” Immediately, the husband reached down to the seat between them, grabbed an open box of snacks and said, “*Here, have another cookie.*”

Evidently, that man was in no hurry to have another child. He was not urgent for a new birth like she was. We see just the opposite in our Epistle Lesson for today. There is a real sense of urgency to St. Paul’s message in our text. He reminds us that the time is growing short. Our world is drawing to a close. And as a result there needs to be a certain sense of urgency to the way we live our Christian lives. We need to urgently strengthen our faith each and every day. But we also need to be urgent about birthing more people into God’s kingdom, bringing more new children into His holy family, by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

That’s why Paul was so earnest in writing to the Corinthians. You see, the ancient city of Corinth was a decadent place. It was full of prostitution and corruption. Too much wealth and the presence of many sailors on shore leave led to the lowering of moral standards. Wild drunken orgies were the pastime of the day. In fact, the very Greek word *korinthiazesthai*, which is to live like a Corinthian meant to live in drunken and immoral debauchery. Unfortunately, the Christians living there were also lured in by lusts of the flesh, so that they were giving into apathy, not sharing

their faith, and in danger of losing their salvation altogether. For you see, the watchword of the times was *tolerance*. Live and let live. There's no hurry. Tomorrow we'll worship and fast, pray and study the Scriptures. But today we'll enjoy the world!

Sound familiar? It's really not so very different from our own day and age. The advice of our world today is quite similar – be tolerant of all things. And the more bizarre and shameless they are, the more we become desensitized to them and simply put up with them. For the world says, *“Do whatever you want to do, as long as you don't hurt anyone else. And even then, if it's for a good cause, it's okay. After all right and wrong are relative terms. You make your own right and wrong!”* And unfortunately, even we Christians can get sucked into that mentality.

For instance, we may think it's all right to drink to excess, as long as you don't make a habit of it. It's all right to abuse your children, as long as you're disciplining them. It's all right to watch dirty movies, as long as they have a good point. It's alright to talk about people behind their backs, as long as what you say is true. But is that really what God's Word says? To paraphrase the old Hertz commercial – NOT EXACTLY. Far from it! The Word of God says: **“THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH!”** And if we give into sin and temptation, instead of confessing and repenting of it, then like the Corinthians we be in danger of giving into apathy, not sharing our faith, and losing our salvation altogether.

My friends, that's why our text for today is so relevant, for as Paul reminds us in the opening verse: **“THE APPOINTED TIME HAS GROWN VERY SHORT SHORT!”** Time as we know it is getting shorter and shorter every day, and we must adjust our thinking and living accordingly. As a matter of fact, the word *short* that Paul uses in our text is a seafaring term, referring to the sails on a boat. Specifically, it refers to the

fact that when a boat was approaching its port, the sails would gradually be drawn in so that they became smaller and smaller. That way the ship could slow down and enter the harbor safely.

That's the kind of picture we ought to have in our mind's eye, the kind of attitude we ought to cultivate in our Christian living. We are like sailors on a boat (the Church), approaching the final port (heaven). And that final port will come through death or through Christ's Second Coming, either of which could happen at any time. So, like sailors we need to constantly be alert, waiting, listening for the captain's command to draw in the sails. In other words, our attitude towards this world ought to be one of temporariness, transitoriness. We should not be concerned with the wind and the waves around us, that is, the things of this world. Instead, we should only be concerned with the Captain's voice, Jesus' command to remain in the boat of the Church, and bring others into the boat. We should only be concerned with the Word and Will of Jesus. Otherwise, we will miss our safe harbor or rest, drift back out to sea, and be lost forever!

Now to help us cultivate the proper attitude, St. Paul gives us a string of exhortations in our text: "FROM NOW ON, LET THOSE WHO HAVE WIVES LIVE AS THOUGH THEY HAD NONE, AND THOSE WHO MOURN AS THOUGH THEY WERE NOT MOURNING, AND THOSE WHO REJOICE AS THOUGH THEY WERE NOT REJOICING, AND THOSE WHO BUY AS THOUGH THEY HAD NO GOODS, AND THOSE WHO DEAL WITH THE WORLD AS THOUGH THEY HAD NO DEALINGS WITH IT." At first glance, it seems like a set a weird and impossible demands. How can those who are married live as if they were not? Does Paul want us to start ignoring our spouses or families? Certainly not! Earlier in this same chapter

Paul told the Corinthians: “LET THE HUSBAND FULFILL HIS DUTY TO HIS WIFE, AND LIKEWISE ALSO THE WIFE TO HER HUSBAND.” Therefore, St. Paul does not mean that we are to disregard our loved ones. Rather, his point is that as beautiful and important as our family is, there is someone even more important: namely, our loving God. He deserves First Place in our life, then comes our family, and finally, we take last place.

Unfortunately, you and I have a tendency to switch that order around. We want to have First Place. We often look out for our own interests first, and then let God and our family compete for the other places. What Paul is saying is that life is too short to live it that way. Since we are going to spend eternity with the Lord, we ought to start preparing ourselves now, by devoting ourselves to Him and His Word, constantly making use of the Word and Sacraments, and sharing those blessings with others!

Likewise, the apostle tells us that those who mourn should live as though there were nothing to be sad about, even though there are a multitude of sorrowful things in our world – terrorism on every side, abortion and euthanasia on the rise, not to mention our own personal tragedies: A friend is hospitalized with cancer. A loved one dies. A family member rejects us. How can St. Paul tell us not to be sad? And on the other hand, when we do find something to be happy about, he says: “LET THOSE WHO REJOICE LIVE AS THOUGH THEY WERE NOT REJOICING!”

With that kind of advice, we probably wish we could just get away from it all – close our eyes, stop up our ears and just disappear. You know, there is one creature that can do that. It’s the octopus. Whenever it comes up against something it’s afraid of, something too tough to handle, the octopus shoots out a cloud of black ink, a kind of

cloaking device that hides it. Then, while its predator is confused, the octopus slips into a hole and disappears.

Maybe sometimes we wish that we could do that. Yet, St. Paul has a better suggestion for us than that. Instead of us disappearing, Paul promises that our problems will disappear. Not instantly, of course. But slowly and surely God is dissolving our problems. In the words of our text: “THE PRESENT FORM OF THIS WORLD IS PASSING AWAY!” Paul’s contention is that our tears and laughter, the pleasures and pains of this life are fading away. And when they are gone, the only thing that will remain is God and His everlasting love. This sinful, painful world we live in is not permanent. It is being going to be replaced by a brand new heavenly world, where we will live in perfect joy, peace and contentment with Jesus Christ.

After all, not only are our problems undergoing a disappearing act. So also are our sins, faults and shortcomings. They are undergoing the greatest disappearing act of all time, thanks to Jesus’ atoning death on the cross and His justifying resurrection from the grave. His Gospel of forgiveness is our cloaking device that hides us from the wrath of God. However, He doesn’t shoot out a cloud of black ink, like an octopus. Instead, He covers us up with His pardoning blood, shed on Calvary to erase all our guilty stains. He does it over and over again in the Word and Sacraments, so that we can slip away from our predators – Satan, death and hell – and so that we can be delivered from our sin and shame. You see, not only is the form of this world passing away. The form of our iniquity is also passing away, it is being disintegrated forever, through the gift of saving faith in Jesus Christ!

Which is part of the reason Paul says that the time has grown short. The word short comes from a verb that can mean: ‘to wrap up with bandages.’ And it’s a

beautiful picture of what Jesus has done for us by His cleansing blood. He's purified the wounds of our sin and guilt, wrapped them up in the bandages of His healing love, and made us whole and well again by His forgiveness and peace. In other words, sin's very existence is short. For once Jesus comes again and takes us to our Heavenly Home, sin and guilt, death and hell will be eradicated once and for all, and we will be finally free!

High in the Alps there is a monument raised to honor a guide who perished while trying to save a stranded tourist. Inscribed on that stone monument are these words: "*He died climbing!*" Dear friends, so it is with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He, too, died climbing. He climbed all the way up Mount Calvary, climbed up on that cross to rescue us from sin, death and hell, so that we would not perish but have everlasting life. Such was the urgency of His love for you and me. And our love for others needs to be just as urgent, because the time is short. We need to reach out of the boat and witness to those around us, who are perishing. It's like those offers you see on TV: For a limited time only you can receive this special gift. We only have a limited time to spread the Gospel so that people can be saved, and that appointed time is right here and now. Now is the time to talk to that co-worker about Jesus. Now is the time to reach out a helping hand to those in need. Now is the time to share the love of Christ with your family member. Now is the time to speak to a delinquent member and call them back to God's House, to invite a friend to church, or bring a neighbor to Bible Class. Now is the time spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May God the Holy Spirit empower us to do that each and every day of our lives – to be urgent in our service for Him, for the time is short. Amen.