

Time

by EARL F. PALMER

In autumn 1939, C.S. Lewis gave a speech at Oxford University to students and faculty that he titled "Learning In Wartime." It could have been titled "Thoughts About The Possibility Of The End Of The World."

Everyone in the Oxford University church of St. Mary the Virgin at that evening service was deeply worried about the very survival of western civilization in the face of a brutal invasion of Poland by the German army that had plunged the world into war. Students wondered what they should do about their education; some even speculated that history was nearing its boundary with eternity and therefore they had questions about the viability of their present life as students of Latin or History or Medicine or Theology. Would there be time to finish their courses? Lewis, as a Christian, squarely faced their questions about the future. These are some of his words he said that evening:

"You would be surprised if you knew how soon one begins to feel the shortness of the tether: of how many things, even in middle life, we have to say 'No time for that,' 'Too late now,' and 'Not for me.' But Nature herself forbids you to share that experience. A more Christian attitude, which can be attained at any age, is that of leaving futurity in God's hands. *We may as well, for God will certainly retain it whether we leave it to Him or not.* Never, in peace or war, commit your virtue or your happiness to the future.

"Happy work is best done by the man who takes his long-term plans somewhat lightly and works from moment to moment 'as to the Lord.' It is only our *daily* bread that we are encouraged to ask for. The present is the only time in which any duty can be done or any grace received."

Lewis learned this view of history from Jesus Christ. Our Lord did not want his disciples to speculate about the timing of the boundary either of their own lives or of history itself. When we think it over, we realize that this exhortation is wise and realistic advice in our favor. *Keep awake therefore, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming. ... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour* Matt. 24:42,44.

The discipleship teaching throughout the New Testament is clear; we are to live in obedience to the

gospel as present tense Christians wide awake and carrying on the ministry that God has given us to do, leaving the time boundaries in his hands. We should not worry about shortness of time issues nor about the time it takes to invest the gifts of God's love and faithfulness in the lives of people here and now. There is time, and time is on our side because we work and live within the hours, days, weeks, and years that belong to the Lord of time.

Therefore Christians are the ones who should be able to relax and live without the disorienting panic that crowds in on the human spirit when time is reduced to a theoretical or predetermined chart. When this happens to us, then chronological time itself becomes the real Lord of our lives and it usually terrorizes us. Time when it is framed in our mind by either a secular or religious schedule has the effect of diverting our attention away from the Lord of history to a plan of history. In both instances these time dogmas become a very poor substitute for a present tense living relationship with Jesus Christ the Lord.

Maybe as a pastor I should avoid preaching any timetable as if I know more than I do. It is enough to focus on what we do know. I believe the unflappable St. Paul has this in mind when he encourages his friends at Philippi to trust here and now in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known to everyone. The Lord is close by Phil 4:4-5.

When one week or year ends and another week or year begins, we who trust in the Lord of Time should live on and through that boundary in the same way as in the face of any other boundary, in daily gratitude and in daily responsibility as a disciple of Jesus Christ. St. Augustine put time in its right place: "O God who art ever at work and ever at rest may we be ever at work and ever at rest." Because of Christ we are not a people of timetables or charts or predictions but a people of relationships with God and with each other. We leave the future in God's hands.

We might as well because the future is in his hands whether we leave it there or not.

EARL PALMER is interim preaching pastor in residence at National Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C.

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