

Telling Time

July 2021 (27 June - 31 July)



Time is strange. *Really* strange. Surely the march of time is completely universal, a grand equaliser, no matter what it passes for everybody at the same rate. Of course it doesn't feel like that — in any given moment it can fly, drag, leap, stand still, spool backwards, and skip forward... Our experience of time passing is so fluid and subjective, dependent on our circumstances...

But then, maybe in our experiences we are on to something as it turns out that physicists like Carlo Rovelli suggest that actually time isn't a fixed external constant in the first place. It's not the same everywhere and for everyone. For instance Rovelli explains in his book *The Order of Time* that time goes faster at high altitude than at sea level: "Two friends separate, with one of them living in the plains and the other going to live in the mountains. They meet up again years later: the one who has stayed down has lived less, aged less, the mechanism of his cuckoo clock has oscillated fewer times. He has had less time to do things, his plants have grown less, his thoughts have had less time to unfold ... Lower down, there is simply less time than at altitude." Time is affected by gravity! Oh and also by the speed we are moving as precise measurements have shown it slows down the faster we go.

So time is pretty strange concept at the best of times. But then it gets weirder. Our whole experience of feeling time pass, of it *flowing*, could be more down to how we ourselves process reality than an external, objective 'time'. What is 'now' for each of us is determined by how we interpret what is coming at us and that takes time for us to process. It turns out there is a lot we still don't know about how time works.

Apparently when you look at the big picture of general relativity or the microscopic picture of quantum theory there isn't a straightforward universal 'time' like we tend to think of it, time is richer and weirder than that. At one point Rovelli describes time beautifully and confusingly like so: "It has a different rhythm in every different place and passes here differently from there. The things of this world interweave dances made to different rhythms."

It's fair to say it's mind melting stuff...

But this past year and a half has given each of us new insights into the mysteries of time. For some of us it has run very fast lived at a frenetic pace, while for many these have been some of the slowest months of our lives. For others time has been stopped altogether by heartbreak, loss of employment or grief. For most of us perhaps life through lockdowns has been a mix of all three, racing, freezing and dawdling.

Time has not always gone in a straight line either. Sometimes the changes in our routines have made us rewind to a different, perhaps simpler time. Or we have been fast forwarding to a transformed future, utopian or dystopian depending on the day. If time can go sideways it has done that too giving us a glimpse of alternative realities: socially, economically and ecologically.

Each month at Sanctuary First we come to the Bible with our questions, our longings and our hopes. We open ourselves up anew to what these ancient words are saying to us today in the very midst of our lives *now* (whenever that is...). This month we want to tackle time itself. It's that gap that lies between how the Bible came about and now. Between the creation of everything and the end of this sentence. Between Christ's ultimate gesture of love and sacrifice and our heartfelt prayers today. These gaps can seem colossal... but our God is outside of time. God can reach through our experience of time unfolding and find us right here, right now. The Bible is a whirlwind, a library of books that bursts into history and reverberates continually. The Cross is a profound event that resonates for all time. In the passing of an instant we can brush close to eternity. The Kingdom is at hand.

So over these summer days, which stretch out longer up in Scotland, we are going to be meditating on time. We will be thinking about what it means to live through time, how we can begin to access a reality beyond time, and what our experience of time can tell us about the wonder and generosity of God.

As they say, time will tell.

Each week of the five week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and thought triggers.

Mornings (27 June)

Lark or night owl? Is an early rise a promise or a punishment? Begrudging alarm clock or gleefully up before the dawn chorus? In this first week we are going to think about mornings, and days more generally, the cosmic revolutions that fundamentally structure our lives. The ancient markers that gave and continue to give our lives order. With a continual rhythm days break and with each break they break our lives into bars, little passages, building up the music of our everyday reality. In despair, in delight, in desperation, in determination what does it mean to walk with God day after day?

1. 2 Samuel 1: 17-27

2. Psalm 130

3. Lamentations 3: 22-33

4. Psalm 30

5. Mark 5: 21-43

6. Genesis 1: 14-19

7. Psalm 19: 1-6

1. **Holding back the dew...** In our grief it is understandable that we want to hold off the normal transition of time and it is painful to see the rest of the world move on. But in each new day there can, over time, be gentle healing too as the refreshing dew points to new life.
2. **Watching for the morning.** What mornings mean to us both literally and figuratively during long dark nights of the soul.
3. **Mercies new every morning.** Contemplating the mercies that get us through the day.
4. **Joy comes with the morning.** A real, living relationship of petition and praise.
5. **Waking up the next day.** What happened next do you think for the suffering girl and the suffering woman after their encounters with Jesus?
6. **Day after day.** Why not 24/7 dazzling light? Why different intensities of light?
7. **The glory of God that is with us from horizon to horizon, from sunset to sunrise to sunset!** Walking with God though our days and nights.

Year on year (4 July)

One of the startling features of our social media accounts and smartphones is how they can suddenly surprise us with a notification saying effectively 'Guess where you were exactly seven years ago, or ten years ago, or however many...?' and then show us a picture from that date. The image might be from a special life event like a loved one's wedding or it might just be a picture of what you had for lunch that day. The vertigo inducing feeling of being confronted suddenly by the past is a mini-rollercoaster — evoking unexpected memories and emotions in the midst of the present. Perhaps more than anything these jolts remind us sharply of the distinction between the things that are constant and the things that fade. Your hairstyle may have changed eight times since then... but the set of the chin is the same. That restaurant may have closed ten years ago but the tiny bit of elbow at the edge of the frame, leaning casually on the table, is connected to the shoulder you are leaning on now. Looking at how our faith has travelled over the years can give us new perspectives that we miss in the day to day.

1. 2 Samuel 5: 1-5

1. **Over the span of years.** At any given moment we are at the hinge point of the decades that have led to this point and the decades to come. Various things led us to this moment and many things will lead from it. Times of transition — like for David at his coronation— can be important moments of reflection as we triangulate where we are, with where we have been, and where we are going.

2. Psalm 48: 9-14

3. Ezekiel 2: 1-5

2. **Years and years.** A steadfast love that was known in this ancient poetry and in this very moment, unceasing.

4. Psalm 123

3. **A prophet for this generation.** Who are the prophets speaking to the years we are living through now?

5. Mark 6: 1-6

4. **Good years and bad years.** We divide time into seasonal partitions with years as convenient bookends for reflection. Some years (perhaps like 2020...) are Psalm 123 years when we tell God we have had more than enough. But the calendar keeps going and so does God's love and mercy.

6. Psalm 90

7. Philippians 3: 7-16

5. **Changing through the years.** The challenges of returning home and reconciling the changes brought through time.

6. **Learning to tell time.** An honest human cry before the creator of all.

7. **Forget all that...** We can learn a lot from our memories but we are not bound by them, we are not trapped by them. Our God of mercy and love does not want us trapped under the weight of the past. Our God has a better prize in mind than melancholy or nostalgia. In God's tender love there is a home for all of us no matter where we have come.

Seconds (11 July)

Everything can change in an instant. A heart can be broken, a dream shattered, a breath extinguished. But also it can take less than a second for a heart to be mended, a dream restored or a breath given. In the split seconds of everyday life — in those moments when we are so fully present and hardly even aware of time passing — God is right there with us.

1. 2 Samuel 6: 1-5, 12b-19

1. **In the moment.** David was entirely in the zone dancing with all his might — completely present, second to second, worshipping God.

2. Psalm 24: 1-2

2. **The earth is the Lord's... and every time in it.** Every instant, every moment... without fail... God is present.

3. Psalm 85: 8-13

3. **It started with a kiss.** Righteousness and peace aligning together in the perfect moment to support one another, bringing transformation.

4. Ephesians 1: 3-14

4. **Connected to the fullness of time.** In the seconds passing right now we are connected to eternity through Jesus Christ!

5. Matthew 14: 22-33

5. **Second by second.** Let's enter the scene from a disciple's perspective and imagine that the section between verses 25-32 only took a matter of seconds, less than a minute from seeing Jesus on the waves to Peter being hauled on to the boat. It must have been a rollercoaster for all the disciples — especially (and almost literally...) for Peter.

6. Matthew 26: 47-56

6. **At once.** Now let's try and get into the mindset of Jesus. With divine knowledge and human vulnerability he experienced the passage of time as we do, second by second, knowing he couldn't just summon angels to rescue him in the blink of an eye. What on earth must that have been like?

7. John 16: 16-22

7. **From the perspective of 'a little while'.** Little whiles can feel like eternities, while whole months or years can fly by. Why is our experience of time so subjective and dependent on circumstance? Through it all we can find reassurance in these words. While there is pain, there is also joy. While there is suffering, there is also hope. In this very instant you are known, you are loved.

All History (18 July)

In the life of Jesus of Nazareth divinity burst into history in a moment of extraordinary love that stands outside of time... resonating forever.... and ever...

1. Ephesians 2:
11-22

2. Mark 6: 30-34,
53-56

3. Colossians 1:
15-20

4. Hebrews 1: 1-4

5. Psalm 78: 1-4

6. Ecclesiastes 3:
9-15

7. Hebrews 13: 8
and John 19:
28-30

1. **The hinge point of history.** The life, death and resurrection of Jesus that unites us all.

2. **Witnessing history unfold.** The crowds didn't want to miss this...

3. **In him *all things hold together*.** Wow, trying to get our heads around this idea of Jesus as some kind of force reverberating throughout space and time...

4. **...the exact imprint of God's very being...** In the life of Jesus, God was printed vividly on to one particular page of history!

5. **Telling of wonders.** The past may be done and dusted, but *history* isn't static — it is rediscovered and reshaped through generations. What are the stories we need to relearn to tell?

6. **A glimpse.** From where we stand we only get to glimpse a little way back and a little way forward but God is outside of time — accompanying us through history, but not bound by it.

7. **Yesterday / today / for ever.** The vagabond teacher, the beloved friend who gave up his life, The Word at the heart of the universe — Jesus has always been and always will be the same.

Time's Gonna Tell (25 July)

Hindsight, foresight, and a sight for sore eyes, all in good time.

1. 2 Samuel 11: 1-15

1. **A total mess.** Lust, lies, lashing out.

2. Psalm 14

2. **Beware treating others as disposable!** Eugene Peterson's *The Message* renders verse 4:

*Don't they know anything,
all these predators?
Don't they know
they can't get away with this—
Treating people like a fast-food meal
over which they're too busy to pray?*

3. 2 Kings 4: 42-44

4. Psalm 145: 10-18

3. **Abundance.** Sometimes we think we don't have enough, not nearly enough. There's no way, it's just not happening. And yet God specialises in small beginnings...

5. Ephesians 3: 14-21

4. **Our openhanded God.** God's hands are open, they are not the cunning hands of a conjurer hiding a trick up their sleeve or of a creditor tightly grasping a ledger.

6. John 6: 1-15

5. **Boundless God.** God's love isn't available for a trial period, there isn't an initial offer window, there isn't an expiry date, there isn't a cancellation fee, there isn't a fair usage limit. It's huge. It's truly, truly huge.

7. Mark 1: 14-15

6. **Enough.** In contrast to the callous 'fast-food' of Psalm 14 above, here is nourishing slow food. Thanks is thoughtfully given for this meal and it is painstakingly shared out until all are full. To the human soul crying: "Is there enough? Is there really enough? Enough for someone like me, on the edge, on the fringe, hovering at the back." Jesus responds: "Yes, there's enough."

7. **The Kingdom is at hand.** The very Kingdom of God has drawn near. We may not always be able to see it, but sometimes we can hear a trace of it on the wind, or feel something indefinable under our feet, or get a certain taste, or pick up something of the fragrance of it. But from time to time, we do get a glimpse of the Kingdom — God's beautiful unfolding reality — and when we do, it's a sight for sore eyes.