

Soli Deo Gloria
Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United
By the Rev Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

"Time between Times"

June 9, 2024

20th in the Sermon Series

James 4:1-17

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PtdpI-D6mM&t=26s>

As we saw on the video clip this movie which was first seen as a Broadway play and about a little red-haired orphan girl named "Annie," who was adopted by the richest man in the nation. A large part of the popularity of that story was because of the main song in the play. "Tomorrow, tomorrow, I love ya' tomorrow; you're only a day away."

That little girl had had a tough life. Both her parents had died in a car wreck, she had grown up in an orphanage without love and guidance, and just when things were looking up for her, she was kidnapped. So, for her, all that she had to live for was tomorrow. There was nothing of any beauty in today. The thought of tomorrow was a promise of hope. Maybe tomorrow will be better than today.

Though tomorrow can be seen as a source of hope; it can also be an excuse to put off things that we should do today. "Why do today what I can put off until tomorrow?"

"For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." James says.

Ask anyone you meet to give you a definition of life, and no two people will give you the same answer. Even in this congregation, the answers would be as varied as the colours on this Christ Candle. Each of us may have our own interpretation of life, a non-believer may think that life is an accident, while the believer acknowledges life as a sacred trust from God.

Kierkegaard once said that life must be lived forwards but can only be understood backwards.

And so, in some measure we live in the time between times - the time where these questions seem to surface, and we come face to face with the future.

I

It is often during these times--the time between times--which we find ourselves living with **uncertainty**. Scripture recognizes this as well. In James we hear; "*Come now, you who say, 'today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.*" It is true. Isn't it?

The future both fascinates and frightens us. Every year we have dozens of fortune tellers in the News Tabloids" trying to tell us what is going to happen to celebrities and to society. People go to fortune tellers, to see what the future will hold for them. And for the most part the people come away from it all none the wiser. Yet they are still anxious about tomorrow.

One British psychologist asked three thousand people the question, "What are you living for?" He was shocked when he found out that most of the people--90%--were simply putting up with the present while they waited for the future: they were waiting for something to happen--waiting to graduate, waiting to get married, waiting for their next promotion, waiting for retirement, waiting while today slipped through their hands unnoticed.

It seems that we are either wasting our time or worrying about it because of the uncertainty. There is much that is uncertain in life; not the least of which is life itself. We make plans and then they are changed because of something outside of our control. We try to tell what is coming just around the corner so we can plan, but unexpected things come up; and everything changes.

I know that for me, I may make a list of what I need to do on a certain day, but I am lucky if I get 2 of the ten things done. I know that the moment I get into the office, there will be a call, or a crisis, or a new commitment. I know that there will be someone who will need something, and my day begins to change. The words of James often come back to me during these times. "Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow I will go...and do such and such...it is better to say, if the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

We come here today, certain that God's sovereignty is over the uncertainty. That's it. That is what we must remember. We come to recognize that no matter what happens; we are in the hands of God. We come here today to say as the Scripture states, *"If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that". "If the Lord wills..." Only, if the Lord wills!*

How else are we to live? Are we to live as one without faith? To do anything else is to live as an unbeliever. To fret and fume about the future is to fail to recognize and affirm the reality of God's Sovereignty. It is to fail to realize that God is indeed in control.

Wordsworth put it this way,

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from a far;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:

God is home. "It is in Him that we live and move and have our being." As St. Paul said. But that is exactly what we do. We do fret and fume about the future. Don't we? We do that--and when we do -- we do the same as unbelievers. It is then that we must remind ourselves that we are not God, but God is God.

II

We are reminded in the Scriptures that the time between times make us focus on God's Sovereignty over the uncertainty, but also that the time between times is **necessary**.

"Come now, you who say, 'today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

The time between times is necessary; we couldn't get on without it. It is fitting, for example, that one who has been bereaved should not recover overnight. To do so would trivialize the lost relationship. It is unwise and unhealthy to act quickly after an experience of grief. So, we recognize that waiting is a kind of doing. It puts a useful distance between us and the experience we found difficult.

Caitlin Thomas, the wife of the poet Dylan Thomas understood this. She wrote a book about it after the death of her husband. The title of the book was "Left over life to Kill." Yet, she too, discovered that we can do more with our remaining time than kill it. We do emerge; and while our sense of loss is great, we recognize our period of grief as time between times. Life is uncertain. And so, we are left often, in limbo--in a time between times. Yet, this time is necessary.

Even we, at Stouffville United, had been for a few years been in a time between times – due to having made the decision to change from a full time minister to a half-time, to come through Covid prayerfully make plans even with all of the uncertainty holding onto God's Sovereignty to use this very necessary time to plan, and prepare for the future. During this time many wonders; what will the future hold for us, for our families, for our church. Should we make plans? Of course, one makes plans - but not as one who misunderstands life; but rather, as one who understands it from God's perspective.

Winston Churchill passed through his own wilderness experience, his time between times. He was out of the office, but his moment came, and the world's future was shaped by his readiness. "I felt I walked with destiny, and that all my life had been a preparation for this hour." He said. Not only was the time out of the office a time between time, but he was saying that the whole of his life was a time between times. It was then that he was readied for that hour of the countries' and world's need.

We honour today the 80th Anniversary of D-Day when many of our family members here at Stouffville United served and risked their lives during WW II, like my father who flew Lancaster Bombers on D-Day and Jaci father who guided those bombers and planes to safety and my uncles who landed on the beaches of Normandy with some of your family members. It was a time between time and in between time of peace where war was raged in order to return to a time of peace,

When we look at things in this manner, it really does change our perspective. Now, doesn't it? If we think of it in this manner, then the time between times that we experience in life can be very useful. It can be a time of re-visioning, or reorganizing, refocusing on what and who we are to be for the Lord.

III

We are reminded in the Scriptures that the time between times make us focus on God's Sovereignty over the uncertainty; and that time between times are necessary. And finally, that they offer us a new life **philosophy**.

Once we comprehend the brevity of life--that we are "*a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*"--we begin to look at life and live life differently.

Too often we fail to make the most of every moment because we fill our moments with things that don't necessarily matter. ☹️

It is like the woman who asked a waitress for another cup of coffee. The waitress started to pour the coffee and told the woman to say *when*, but both got distracted. The result was that the coffee overflowed the cup, and the saucer and then the table and then onto floor. We are just

like that. We allow others to pour into our lives, requests, expectations and obligations and we never say *when*.

Rev. Sylvia Dunstan, a minister from Scarborough and author of a few of the hymns in the New Hymn book *Voices United* was diagnosis with cancer. She was a friend, and I went to visit her. She said to me, "For the first time in my life I feel free." I wasn't sure if it was too much medication or she was just a bit confused, but I said, "What?"

"Well,," she said, "I have never been able to say no to people without feeling guilty. I have never truly lived my life because I have always been living someone else's. I have been always doing what was expected of me. And for the first time I am free. Just the other day someone called and asked if I could be on a committee. I said, 'No'. They asked me why and I finally had a good reason. I said, 'Because I am dying.' The person said she would find someone else."

Tim McGraw wrote a song about someone who was diagnosed with a terminal illness called *Sky Diving*.

I went sky diving
I went rocky mountain climbing
I went two point seven seconds on a bull named Fu Manchu
And I loved deeper
And I spoke sweeter
And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying
And he said one day I hope you get a change
To live like you were dying.

You think about that. Amen.