

No Time at All!

East Window, March 2004

The 2001 Census figures reveal that there are for the first time more people in the UK over 60 than under 16. If immigration and birth rates don't increase sharply, by the time my generation retires our society will not have enough people of working age paying the tax to pay our pensions. Our futures don't seem too secure, but you cannot stop the clock ticking.

I begin to think that of all the machines created by humankind, the one which has most influenced our lives is the clock! Time has become the most precious commodity in our society. I was happy to give my blood at the Transfusion Clinic the other day, but to sit and wait in the queue was a real challenge – give my blood yes, but not my time! Our lives seem controlled by it, so in return we seek to control it by buying anti-wrinkle creams and time-saving devices that end up only giving us more time either to work or sit in front of mindless TV programmes exhausted. It's all rush, rush, and little quality time left. Medics are obsessed with adding years to our span of life, but there seems to be little time given to adding life to our span of years.

A friend told me yesterday, "I'd hate to be in that position where I knew I was going to die." I found that a very strange statement indeed. Surely, we all know we're going to die. We only have a limited period of time allotted, so it's probably about time we got this 'time' thing sorted out. And perhaps a helpful way in to our question is to remember that the first mechanical clocks were invented by monks, to help them know when it was time to say their daily and nightly prayers. The key to those old clocks, and to our conundrum, is to remember that time is God's gift to us – it's not 'our time' but 'God's time'. So to complain that in time we all going to die is like being at a wonderful party but to spend all the time complaining to the host that come midnight we've got to go home. God has given us a wonderful gift, so let's enjoy the party to the full, not live our lives as if the gift were simply not sufficient or enjoyable enough.

A recent Church of England Report, *Being Human*, helps us reflect on how we might use God's gift of time wisely. It offers a few suggestions. First, it says, why not revel in *gratitude* for it. Past memories are there to be treasured – older people can teach us that. And we can temper that gratitude with a sense of *repentance* for those past times when we have not done well. That will help us deal with times past, but for the present we can also practice *alertness* – being ready to welcome any challenge or opportunity, so that we are alive to God's possibilities for us. But that alertness likewise needs to be tempered with *rest*. Rest is what the Sabbath, at its best, was all about – knowing how to sit back and enjoy the present moment as God's gift to us. Gratitude and repentance for the past, alertness and rest for the present, and for the future, we should lay hold of that spirit of *Hope*. Hope is when, despite all that we may fear, we open ourselves to allow God's future to penetrate our present and set it on fire with love and Kingdom of God expectation.

If we manage to live our lives like this, with an openness to God in our past, our present and our future, then time will not longer be the old adversary after all! We won't find ourselves with 'no time at all' but instead we'll be experiencing moments of exquisite joy, enjoying the party, and having the Time of our lives!

God bless you.

+ Laurie Bradwell