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1/1/2016, The Name of Jesus
All Time Belongs to Him

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

At this time of year, on the threshold of this new year of our Lord 2016, I find myself thinking ahead to one of the grandest liturgies of the whole year: I mean, the Easter Vigil. Especially I find myself thinking of what is called the “inscribing of the candle.” This takes place at the start of the liturgy, outdoors on the front steps of the church beside a small fire – very dramatic. Sexton Chris Schulze holds the great Paschal candle for me, like this one (a bygone candle, from 2013). My first job is to trace with a nail the Cross, the letters Alpha and Omega, and the numerals of the year. Most times I use a regular old nail, but this year I think I will use one of our new slate roof nails, because, see, it is much longer and more grim, like the spikes that were driven into the body of our Lord Jesus.

As I trace these things with the nail, I am to speak solemn words – words about time:

☐ Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. *All time belongs to him, and all the ages.* To him be glory and dominion, forever and ever.

☑ **Amen.**

This is my theme on this New Year’s Day, this liturgy for the Name of Jesus: “All time belongs to him, and all the ages.” In particular, this is a good year and a good age to bear the name of Jesus with as much courage and kindness and integrity as we can. Let us resolve that this year of our Lord 2016 will be a good Christian year for us.

It seems to me that there are two strong sides to this saying, “All time belongs to him,” to Christ. One side is a stewardship side. It urges us to cherish the time granted to us, for is indeed *granted* to us, for a season, by its true owner, Jesus Christ.

The other side of the saying is meant for our encouragement: This year ahead of us belongs to Christ. There will be no God-forsaken stretch of time this coming year. There will be no neglected moment. The year 2016, and indeed, “all the ages,” belong to Christ, and we can count on him to be the Good Shepherd always on guard this coming year for the sake of his sheep – including you and me.

CHERISH THE TIME GRANTED TO US

So, let's consider the first side of the saying – the stewardship side and our duty to use well the year that stretches ahead of us. To begin, let me lift up the Offering Prayer we use at nearly every liturgy, including this morning's liturgy:

- Ⓐ Let us pray. Merciful Father,
- Ⓑ we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us--ourselves, *our time*, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

There is wisdom in this prayer, I do believe. It is a classic stewardship theme that our “possessions” – our money and so forth -- have been entrusted to us by God. Some of us are rich, some of us are poor, but none of us are the true possessors of what we have. We are more like the guardians or managers of assets that belong to God. For each of us, our money and other resources belong to God, who entrusts them to us, like a master entrusting resources to a steward and expecting those resources to be used well for the sake of the master. So this stewardship theme urges us to think of the divine dimension of our money. We are to give thought to how our Maker would want us to use our money.

So, that's about our money. But the Offering Prayer also speaks of our time. Our time has been given us – given by the One to whom all time and all the ages belong. The wealth of our God is extraordinary. You know that. The Bible speaks of the divine wealth using images of the hunter and the rancher:

For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. (Psalm 50:10, NRSV)

The rancher thinks the cattle belong to him. He will fight the rustlers for them. He will risk life and limb for those cattle on a thousand hills. But really, he is just a steward of those animals. They belong to God. They must never be neglected or abused, and the wealth they represent should be used in God-pleasing ways.

As the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God so too do the days of this coming year belong to him. We take them a day at a time. We spend them well or ill. We are busy as beavers during our days, or we idle them away, but in the end, we are going to have to give an account for the use of our days to the true owner of the se days. And so, I share with you again that old saying of St. John Chrysostom that has urged me on during the years:

For God will say also to us, “I gave you time to learn this art of piety, wherefore have ye foolishly and uselessly wasted that time?” (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St. John*, NPNF, Vol. 14, page 211)

Let us, then, not imagine that we are the masters of the days granted to us. Let us not take things for granted when it comes to time. Rather, let us consider each day of this coming year to be a gift to us from God, who asks us to use that day well. The Lenten words of assurance we use at the end of the midweek Confession service are good ones for us ponder:

- ☐ The almighty and merciful God grant unto you, being penitent, pardon and remission of all your sins, *time for amendment of life*, and the grace and comfort of his Holy Spirit.¹
- ☑ Amen.

We should not presume upon tomorrow. We should not assume that we will always have “time for amendment of life.” Jesus, to whom all time belongs, asks us to come unto him:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28, KJV)

Let us do this today. Let us not put it off till tomorrow. We are not masters of tomorrow. But we can draw closer to Christ today, starting right now. It will make 2016 a better year for us and for those around us.

REST IN CHRIST THIS COMING YEAR

My other theme is that *because* all time belongs to Christ, we can rest in him this coming year. A year ago, never did I guess that I would be leading a memorial service for our member Lori Burnett, as I did a couple weeks ago. She is a person of my own generation. I did not imagine that she would die this past year, but she did. This vast surprise lifts up both themes for me: Time’s a wasting. If we have not yet turned to Christ, now is a good time to do it. If we are not yet baptized, now is a good time to be baptized, as Lori Burnett was. Do not put such things off. But the other side of the coin is also important: Lori was not alone as she died. The EMS people might have rushed to get to her apartment, and failed, but God did not fail her, but led her home, to heaven. Trees fall over in the woods, and no one might see it. Endless waves break upon the shore and no one keeps count. But *nothing* will happen to you this coming year that is overlooked by your Maker, by your Saviour. Not a thing will come your way this coming year that is somehow out of control. Nothing will overtake you this year that is somehow unsolvable or incapable of working its way out for your blessing. Because “all times belongs to Christ and all the ages,” it will be with you as the apostle says:

¹*Service Book and Hymnal*, 1958, an alternative form of assurance of God’s grace.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God (Romans 8:28, KJV)

I conclude this sermon by lifting up the last verse of our Gospel Lesson. It refers to the name of Jesus:

²¹And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. (Luke 2:21, RSV)

And what is that name? I mean, what does the name Jesus mean? Well, the meaning was specified by the angel Gabriel when he spoke to Mary:

³¹And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. ³²He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest:

He is the One to whom this coming year belongs and all the ages. He is not some pampered, unknowing prince, but rather he is the great One, the very Son of the Highest, and your days are safe with him, to whom belongs the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.