

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“Why are You Watching the Hourglass?”**

**Psalm 103:1 – 18
Jeremiah 2:1 – 13, 29 – 32
Matthew 5:1 – 16**

March 15, 2015

Seventeenth Century Worship Service

It has come to my attention that some of you have expressed anxiety and trepidation about the possible length of this morning’s sermon. I’m told of your fears that, flying in the face of common sense and agreed-upon expectations, my homily might extend through one, or two, nay, even three turnings of our one-hour glass.

The source of your concern appears to be that, should my words exceed the puny 15 minutes to which our descendants will one day become accustomed, it might interfere with the worldly pursuits; the irreverent entertainments; the profane amusements... with which you fill your increasingly secularized observance of a Sabbath afternoon. And I have no doubt that, were my sermon to cut so much as five minutes out of your intemperately cherished hours of self-indulgence... the resulting weeping, gnashing of teeth, and howls of protest would reverberate even to the streets of Lynn, Massachusetts.

How greedily you salivate over the epicurean spoils of your leisure; how insatiably you covet the hedonistic joys of your spiritual debasement; how shamelessly you flee the good counsel of Almighty God to chase after fleshly pleasures which imperil your very souls! For a trifling few hours of earthly entertainment... you smilingly, foolishly, place at wager your standing in eternity. As if a brisket, or a game of draughts, or an afternoon of carousing with your equally wayward neighbors, could ever outweigh the bliss and glory of even a single second in the Kingdom of God!

Well do the words of the prophet Jeremiah, delivered to a similarly recalcitrant city of Jerusalem, apply to you... in your all too eager willingness to forsake the Lord’s ways and satisfy your own sensuous cravings.

“Thus saith the Lord,” proclaims the prophet, “what iniquities have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity and are become vain? I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine inheritance an abomination.

“Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children’s children I will plead. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. O generation, see ye the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? A land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, we are lords; we will come no more unto thee.”

This, I say, is an all too apt description of our situation this morning; in which, heedless of the bounteous goodness available to you in a morning spent hearing the exposition of the sacred word of God Almighty, you instead watch the aforementioned hourglass... counting, and

recounting, the too-slow passage of each sandy crystal, in the vain hope that the time might pass more quickly; that you might be the sooner released to the day's decadence.

My dear brothers and sisters, my beloved but wayward flock, I implore you that you not let these accusatory words of the prophet serve as an epitaph to your own waning and weakening faith! Let not, I tearfully beseech thee, this divine oracle of judgment, which brought so much shame upon the distracted heads of the residents of Judea, cast a comparable mantle of dishonor upon your own daydreaming pates!

Divert your focus from the hourglass! Watch not to see if your faithful clergyman, in whom you've placed the trust of this fledgling family of faith, will really be guided by the shifting sands of a man-made timepiece... a mere vestigial artifact of our futile attempt to control, down to the very second, our sorrow-filled days upon this earthly plane! Ignore the hourglass, I say! Renounce it! Consign it, and all it represents, to the burning pits of hell; to the simmering lake of fire; to the miserable outer darkness, whence spring all demonic devices to lead astray, as proclaimed by Paul the Apostle, even the elect... were that possible.

See it not. And, in its place, see the loving God who made you! Observe the Heavenly Father who, alone, gives you your daily bread! Perceive the Lord and King who, in the infinite kindness of His extravagant grace... has provided you with all you will ever need, in this life and the next!

And who asks in return but one thing from us, His beloved children: open hearts, to receive His grace. Open minds, unburdened by worries over time, and obligation, and recreation, to receive His good instruction. Open lives, dedicated not to the fleeting appetites which so often lead to our undoing; but dedicated to the One to whom we owe the gift of life in the first place!

This, my beloved children... my treasured brothers and sisters in the faith; **this** is the vision of faithful life to which the Psalmist points us, in his words to us this morning:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."

That is the gracious God which we worship in this place! That is the good and giving Lord which we serve in all the comings and goings of our public life! That, as Jesus Himself has told us, is the loving Heavenly Father who gives us, each day, our daily bread.

But take heed, and mark: that that is also the God we mock, and put to the test, and sorely take for granted... when we remember not His countless acts of merciful providence, and begrudge Him our time and attention, for a single weekly day of devotion. That is the God whose Holy Spirit we grieve when we turn our backs in childish petulance, upon the life-giving spiritual sustenance which can only be found in communion with Him. That is the God whose gift of eternal life we would carelessly cast to the wind... just for the freedom to walk through those doors in time for our Sunday dinner; thereby trading the glories of heaven, for a full stomach... which will only be once again empty on the morrow.

Oh, friends, let us avoid such an ignoble and disastrous fate! Let us flee from all worldly temptation, from fiendish enticement to shortchange the only One who can save our immortal souls! Let us lay aside all selfish claims on this, the Lord's Sabbath, and devote ourselves, heart, mind, and body, to the holy contemplation of the one true God!

Then shall we take to our beds with peace of heart and mind! Then shall we awaken in the morning awash in the grace of the Lord! Then shall our days be marked by a growing appreciation of the presence and power of Almighty God in the midst of everything we do! Then, and only then, will know the full wealth of conviction... as we, with unshakable confidence, walk in the joy of our salvation!

Friends, it pleaseth me not, to lay upon thy backs the rod of the Lord's chastisement. I take no joy in reminding you of the eternal peril in which you place yourselves, in forsaking the Lord's commandments. But as your minister, so I have been charged to do.

Let us then be encouraged to forsake our wayward desires and miscreant actions. Let us be strong to stay on the path of God's good favor. Let us trust, with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our strength... in the glorious message of the gospel! For in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we find forgiveness for all our sins; mercy in the face of all our failings; and life eternal, which shall not end!

May we joyously receive this wonderful promise! And as a sign of love and friendship on the part of your pastor, may you accept this abbreviated sermon! Remembering always, to getteth not used to it!

To God Almighty be all glory, honor, thanks, and praise! Amen, and amen!