

Not Enough Time
Part of the More Than We Can Imagine Sermon Series
Hebrews 11.1—12.2, selected
Rev. Jenny McDevitt
November 7, 2021
All Saints' Day

Hebrews gets it right, in so many ways. This portion of the letter is an ancient roll call of faith. It is a reminder to its readers in every age that they are not alone; that they stand on the shoulders of giants; that they are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and; that God's welcoming embrace includes those who know and profess Jesus as Lord and those who do not.

This portion of the letter is liturgical in pattern — by faith, Abel; by faith, Enoch; by faith, Noah; by faith, Abraham; and, by faith, Tamar. Some of the names mentioned have chapters upon chapters dedicated to their story while others have a portion of one verse, or maybe two. It is a reminder to its readers in every age that inclusion in the kingdom of God is not determined by status or standing, or by fame or fortune. It is also a reminder that whatever amount of faith you have, it is enough to get you through. Because, if your faith is fragile one day, the faith of others will hold you up. And, if your faith is strong the next day, chances are you'll support someone else.

This portion of the letter is also honest. In fact, by my evaluation, it includes one of the most honest, human statements in scripture: "And what more should I say? Oh, time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Sampson . . ." Time would fail me. The truth is, time fails us every day.

We mentioned earlier that today is All Saints' Day, so, I think this is a good time to invoke Saint Beyoncé. A few years ago, a

motivational speaker of some sort said, "You have the same amount of hours in a day as Beyoncé." It flew across the internet, got put on mugs and t-shirts and all the rest and ignited a whole host of controversy. A college professor, also intending to be motivating, wrote it on a white board in a classroom. When the students came to class the next morning, someone had scribbled through it and written, "Beyoncé has people," a reference to the superstar-singer's live-in chef, six nannies to help when her twins were born, to say nothing of personal assistants and all the others.

Now whether you find that pithy little statement inspiring or infuriating, that's up to you. Either way, it points to a few things worthy of our consideration.

Time haunts us all, doesn't it? We can, to different degrees, control how we use our time. However, no matter who we are, what we do, or how hard we try, we cannot manufacture more of it. We fool ourselves sometimes with ideas like Daylight Savings Time, or efficiency studies, or staying up late, or waking up early. I suppose technically time is a human invention - the idea of a 24 hour day. But, if we take it as a given that we are not going to deconstruct the work of ancient Egyptians and their studies of the sun or the civilizations that have structured themselves around it, we have only what we have.

No matter how much time we have, we always want more. Think about it. How often have you said, or thought, "I ran out of time," or "I wish I had more time." And however

much this is true for the measure of a day, it is ever so much more so for the measure of a life. "Oh, time would fail me". Time always fails us. Ultimately, time fails all of us, because we are finite beings. I know that there are lots of tender hearts gathered here today. Hearts that would give just about anything for more time with someone who has died. I know what that feels like. You never really get over grief. You learn to live with it in less painful ways. It never goes away, not entirely, because grief is love by another name, just under different circumstances.

So to be sad today, to wish for more time today, is actually a good and holy thing. Because again, grief shows up where love has always been. Chances are, if you sat down and made a list of everything you loved about your beloved friend or family member; everything you learned from them; everything you laughed about with them; everything you did together on holidays or weekends or Thursday nights or Monday mornings; everything about them that charmed you; everything about them you admired; and, everything you imagined about the future together, time would fail you again, if you tried to make that list. In the best way possible. There would be too much to say to ever capture with words or paper and pencil. And what more should I say? For, oh, time would fail me to tell about Helen and Tom and Scott, about Lily and Elizabeth and William, about Frances and Katie and George and all the rest.

The professor wrote, "you have the same amount of hours in the day as Beyoncé." A student crossed that out and wrote, "Beyoncé has people." I feel certain they weren't intending to be theological with their editing. I know they were making an important point about the realities of class and status and wealth. But, that edit actually was theological. Deeply theological. Maybe you have to remove Beyoncé from it to hear it. So swap

out Beyoncé for ... Molly.¹ (You'd be surprised how often those two are confused for one another...) If someone had written, "You have the same amount of hours in the day as Molly," and someone fixed that sentence to say, "Molly has people," well, that's the gospel.

Time fails us all but we all have people. Some who have gone before us, some who are here with us and some who will carry on after us. Some whom we remember, some who comfort us as we remember and some who will remember us.

Oh, time will fail us all, at some point. But we have people. And, on this day when we remember especially the people of our past, remember this: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ... But faith, hope, and love abide, and the greatest of these is love."²

Time fails us. Love never ends. I hope that you didn't bristle when I referred to "Saint" Beyoncé. I'm mindful that we come from lots of different backgrounds. So a word of clarification. To be a saint in the Roman Catholic Church is an honor reserved for a very select number of those to whom miracles are attributed and veneration is directed. To be a saint in our Reformed tradition, however, is simply to be a person of faith - one as normal as you or me. We are all saints. You are a saint, whether you like it or not.

So I want to tell you about another saint, Katie Cannon. I've mentioned her a few times

¹ Rev. Molly Spangler, Associate Pastor at Shandon Presbyterian Church

² 1 Corinthians 13

before. She was Molly's and my professor in seminary. She was the first African American woman ordained in the Presbyterian Church. I've told you about her before but, I haven't told you this story. When talking with us one day about the ethical implications of calling someone an enemy, she said, "Look. Jesus tells us that in his Father's house there are many rooms. Many rooms. All kinds of rooms. This is good news because I have a list of people I want to be right down the hall from me, and I have another list of people I hope will be housed way across campus." Dr. Cannon, who joined the communion of saints a few years ago, never worried about sounding too holy or sounding too pious, which is probably why her faith was as honest and clear as any I've ever encountered. And after laughing with us about her hopes for the seating chart of heaven, she suddenly became serious and somehow managed to look every one of us in the eye at the same time. "We like to think of heaven as being with everyone we love," she said. "And that's okay. But I am convinced that heaven is more than that. I am convinced that heaven is not just about being with everyone you love. It's also about finally having the ability to love everyone you're with."

This is an important word today, too, because sometimes, when someone dies, time fails us in another way. They die far too young, and we never see what the future might have held for them. Or, they die after an argument or an estrangement, before we have a chance to reconcile or make things right. Or, they die before we ever get a chance to know them at all. Time can fail us in all sorts of ways. But love endures. Love never ends. And God's love reaches into places where ours cannot. Like Paul the apostle says when resurrection comes, "We will all be changed. In a moment. In the twinkling of an eye."

Resurrection changes us, not just from death into life, but from who we were into who God always intended for us to be. And so I believe with every fiber of my being that my teacher was right — that when we join that great cloud of witnesses, we're not just reunited with the ones we love. We're capable of loving everyone we're with. I look forward to that day in so many ways, for so many reasons, don't you?

Oh, time will fail us. But thanks be to God, love never ends.