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Providence Presbyterian Church
First Sunday in Advent
November 30, 2025
Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:36-44
"Making the Most of Our Time"

We've all had one of "those days" haven't we? Those days when nothing seems to go right and even the wrong things are more wrong than usual. I've had lots of THOSE days but one in particular I remember was when I served as presbytery executive in Houston.

The day started out like many other days. I was happy to be at work. The weekend had been a good one – we had a delightful Thanksgiving celebration with friends. I got to watch some football games and even had that Sunday off to relax. All indications were that this would be an excellent day, even though it was a Monday.

But then, little by little, the radiance of the day began to dull as things started to go wrong. First it was a problem with the computers. Then the printers malfunctioned. I received a final report on misappropriation of more than \$1 million and had to fire an employee. I ended up working right through lunch and began to get cranky. My disposition soured and I withdrew. I felt like throwing in the towel - looking for another job - finding some place where people would appreciate me.

Does all this sound familiar? I'm sure it does, because all of us are susceptible to having one of "those" days. By experience we know that good days will always be followed by bad ones, but we are so disappointed when they do come.

Anyway, back to my very bad, no good, awful day – the afternoon was just as bad as the morning. I had several meetings with members of churches who were unhappy with their home church or pastor. I went to a fast food place and gulped dinner down and rushed back to the office for a meeting with the new church development committee. I knew within myself that heart just wasn't in it but I went anyway.

But that is when the Holy Spirit chose to lift my spirits. There was so much energy and excitement among these folks who were supporting 7 new church developments in our presbytery that my mood was transformed from gloomy to glowing. That's when it hit me – In spite of the pitfalls and pratfalls, I love what God has called me to do. I love being a part of making a difference in people's lives. I love getting people to think about their discipleship and how to put into practice what Jesus taught. I love interacting with

followers of Jesus and finding the humor in life. I love helping people through major life passages. I even love committee meetings (well, at least some of them!). So what if I have a bad day now and then. I am blessed to be called by God to do what I love.

That's when I realized that it was the Holy Spirit reminding me of the bigger picture - instructing me to get my focus back to the important aspects of LIFE. I had allowed annoyances to discolor my rosy outlook. I had focused on temporary details to the exclusion of that which was permanent. I had lost sight of the forest for the trees.

Isn't it amazing how quickly our outlook can change, when we concentrate on the minutiae of life? It's sort of like the difference between walking while looking at our feet instead of looking ahead. If we watch only our feet when we walk we lose our sense of direction and balance. Similarly, if we allow ourselves to become totally absorbed in the day-to-day aspects of life, we lose sight of our larger purpose.

Jesus put it this way in the Gospel of Matthew: "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man."

In Noah's day, there were many people who went right on doing business as usual - eating and drinking, working in unsatisfying jobs, washing dishes, writing sermons, marrying, taking tests, going about their daily lives. Then, the flood caught them unaware and swept them away. How trivial all that eating, drinking, marrying, working and exam taking appears when held up against the flood! We focus so much attention on matters that don't matter, that when what matters comes, our lives may not matter.

If the people in Noah's time had known that the flood was coming, do you think they would have continued to be caught up in such triviality? No, they would have forsaken their trivial pursuits for doing something significant with their lives. To be faithful, we must do things that matter to God.

Perhaps one of our greatest fears is that, in the end, the Lord will come only to find us doing things that don't matter to God. As Christians, we need to live in such a way that when God comes to us individually or to all humanity, the Lord will find us engaged in lives which please God rather than ourselves.

I believe Jesus' point in reminding the disciples and us about the dilemma faced by the people in Noah's time was not to scare the "bewilikers" out of us, but to wake us up to the reality that it is time to get with it and do that which makes a difference to God. Life is not about who winds up with the most or biggest toys - it is about who winds up with the greatest **joy** from serving God.

You won't see the name of John Young in the football Hall of Fame, or hear him mentioned on any All-America team, but he is a star of another sort. John loved football, but being considerably smaller than other boys his age, he hardly ever got to play in high school. He made all the practices, but was a perennial bench warmer. John lived alone with his father, who never missed one of his games. His father was always in the stands supporting his son and after the game, would always have words of encouragement for him.

In college, John decided to try out for the team as a "walk-on," and everyone was sure that he would never make the cut, but he did. The coach kept him on the "taxi squad" which played against the starting offense during practice because John played with a lot of heart. He didn't have the size or talent of the other players, but made up for that with determination.

John made the team for all four years in college, but never got to play a down in a game. In spite of that, John's father never missed a game. He was always in the stands cheering for his son's team. In the last week of the season of his senior year, John was met on the practice field by his coach who handed him a telegram informing him of the death of his father. "Coach, is it all right if I miss practice today," asked John? The coach put his arm around John's shoulder and said, "Of course. Why don't you take the rest of the week off, and don't even plan on suiting up for the game."

Saturday arrived and the game was not going well. In the third quarter, John's team was ten points behind when a silent young man quietly slipped into the empty locker room and put on his uniform. John approached his coach saying, "Coach, I've just got to play today." The coach pretended not to hear him, but John persisted until the coach, either out of sympathy or exasperation, decided to put him in the game.

When he did, he couldn't believe his eyes. This little, unknown fourth-string player was everywhere doing everything right. The opposing team couldn't stop him. He tackled and played like a star. Soon, the score was tied. Then, in the closing seconds, John intercepted a deflected pass and ran it back for a winning touchdown.

The fans went crazy and hoisted John on their shoulders. Afterward, in the empty locker room, the coach noticed John sitting quietly in the corner all alone. The coach came to him and said, "Kid, I can't believe it. You were fantastic! Tell me what got into you? How did you do it?"

With tears in his eyes, John looked at his coach and said, "Well, you knew that my dad died, but you probably didn't know that my dad was blind." John swallowed hard and forced a smile as he said, "Dad came to all my games, but today was the first time he could see me play, and I wanted to show him that I could do it!" Like John's father, God is always

cheering us on to do that which matters to Him. What matters most to God is love for all God's children.

It is the beginning of the season of Advent – a time for us to celebrate the hope, peace, joy and love we have in Jesus Christ. The days are growing shorter both literally and figuratively. Now is the time to do that which matters most to God.

Advent is a great season in which life doesn't just go on "as usual." During Advent we get to see glimpses of God's kingdom. God's promises of hope, peace, joy and love and a God as close as the air we breathe are for real, and can be experienced today. In Matthew, Jesus tells us that the kingdom intrudes upon us without warning, when we are least expecting it. Just when we feel like prisoners to the routineness of life, just when the news seems most grim, just when we are the most desperate, the kingdom flashes signs of how close it really is.

This is when we can make the most of our time, doing things that matter the most to God. The prophet Isaiah tells us what the kingdom of God will be like, with wolves, lambs, leopards, goats, calves, lions, yearlings, Democrats, Republicans and Independents all living together and led by a child – a child named Jesus. Indeed, the Kingdom of God is at hand whenever we make the most of our time doing what matters most to God.

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

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen