

August 14, 2016

Church Planting
Time Well Spent
Acts 18:1-11

Opening words: Paul is worse than a United Methodist preacher. He is on the move again. In the past month, we have looked at a variety of stories in this section of Acts. Each one began with Paul in a new location. In the sixteenth chapter, Paul was in Philippi. That is where he met Lydia and spent time in prison. Next, he moved to Thessalonica. That is where he encountered the ugly mob. Then, he moved to Berea. At first, it looked good, but then the ugly mob from Thessalonica arrived. Last week, he was in Athens. That was where he introduced Christian theology to a philosophical, logical culture. In each stop, he experienced both success and challenges. Today, we find him on the move again. He is in the city of Corinth.

On the day Paul arrived, the city of Corinth was quite the place. There is only one word to describe Corinth: diverse. Corinth was a giant in many ways. Corinth was a giant when it came to commerce. Located just off the Corinthian isthmus, Corinth was the crossroads for both travelers and traders. Goods flowed through the city from as far west as Spain to as far east as Egypt. Corinth was a giant when it came to culture. Like Athens, the Corinthians placed a high premium on philosophy and wisdom. Corinth was a giant when it came to religion. Corinth was the home of twelve temples. Corinth was a giant when it came to immorality. Her prostitutes were known around the world. Corinth was a diverse giant. Many would not have even tried, but this is the apostle Paul. Paul knew, the converts he won for Christ in Corinth could easily influence the world. Jesus could be their chief export!

This is sermon number forty-one in my sermon series, *Church Planting*. Do you remember my goal? I am preaching through the Book of Acts. I am doing this for one reason. I am hoping to reconnect with the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who created the church in the very beginning and it will be the Holy Spirit who revives the church again. Human effort and determination are not enough. Our scripture reading for today is Acts 18:1-11. Let me call this message *Time Well Spent*.

Acts 18:1-11 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵ When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." ⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titus

Justus, a worshiper of God.⁸ Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

Allan Bevere is a minister in the East Ohio Annual Conference. I do not know him. He is a minister in Ashland, Ohio and is a professor at Ashland Theological Seminary. He tells the story of being in Atlanta. He was attending some continuing education event. His workshop ran late and he missed dinner. He didn't have any transportation, so was forced to find a place to eat within the vicinity of his hotel. The only restaurant he could find open was a Burger King. As he walked into the Crown Room, a homeless man stopped him and asked him for money. He was hungry. Allan didn't give him money, but he offered to buy him a meal. The homeless man accepted. The two men got in line together and ordered. When they were given their plastic trays, the homeless man said, "Thanks" and turned to eat by himself. Allan decided to eat with him and followed him to a table. He admitted later that it may not have been the wisest choice. The homeless man smelled. Allan said it was hard to eat at first, but then they started to talk. He asked the homeless man his name. His name was Jason. Then, he asked him his story. Jason was originally from southern Florida. He lived with his mother and sister. He hadn't seen his dad in years. His mother found a boyfriend, who lived with them. The boyfriend had abused him and his sister, so they ran. His sister moved in with her boyfriend. Jason bought a bus ticket to Atlanta to make his fortune. That plan did not work, and now he was living in the streets until something worked out. Allan got involved in Jason's story. Allan felt sorry for Jason and offered to buy him a bus ticket back to Florida. Jason declined the offer. He said, "No one wants me in Florida." Allan didn't know how to respond. When the meal was over, the two parted. Allan went back to his clean hotel room. Jason went back to the streets. However, before they parted, Jason said something Allan will never forget. Jason said, "Thank you for your time." He didn't thank him for the food. He thanked him for his time. Do I have to say it? Time is valuable. How do you spend your time? Benjamin Franklin once said, "*Lost time is never found again.*" I think that is true. If you think that is true, say, "**Amen!**"

This morning we find ourselves in the eighteenth chapter of Acts. The very first verse of our reading tells us that Paul had moved to the city of Corinth. As I mentioned earlier, Corinth was a diverse city. Let me state the obvious. He is alone in a large city. It is possible to be alone in a crowd. Relationships become extremely important. The first thing he does is reach out to others. The first people he connects with are a couple by the name of Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. He connects with them on several levels. First, Paul connects with them spiritually. They are believers too. Second, Paul connects with them professionally. Like Paul, they are tentmakers. On the Sabbath, they worshipped together in the synagogue and Paul continued to talk about Jesus. Some believed in Jesus, like the household of Titius Justus. Others refused to believe in Jesus, so Paul

gave up on them. The entire time, God was with him. Verse eleven tells us Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half.

It is that line that grabbed my attention this week. Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half. That is a long time, if you are Paul. Most of his stays were very short. Just backtrack and look at the past few stories. In Philippi, he stayed a few weeks at best. In Thessalonica, he stayed maybe a week. In Berea, he stayed a day. He did not stay long in Athens. I can tell you, traveling gets old. There comes a point when you just want to go home. Or, in Paul's case, you just want to stay. The author says it clearly. Paul stayed in Corinth one and a half years. The time aspect in this story is significant because time, itself, is significant. Psalm ninety tells us God transcends time, but we are preoccupied with time. It has been true throughout the ages. Just think about it for a moment.

One of the news reports that grabbed my attention this week came from Ligonier, Pennsylvania. A three-year-old boy fell from a roller coaster at Idlewild Park. He had to be airlifted to a Pittsburgh Hospital. The family asked for privacy. I hope the boy will be fine. They said he was alert and with his family when he left. What grabbed my attention was the fact that the boy was only three years old. Why would you take a three-year-old on a roller coaster? It was his age that grabbed my attention. We are preoccupied with time!

My sister Susan has a friend by the name of Barbara. I know Barbara. She has been my sister's friend since the beginning of time. Barbara is annoying in every way: know it all, loud, selfish. I'm not even sure my sister even likes her anymore. I said to my sister "Why don't you tell Barbara to get lost, hit the road!" My sister said, "I can't because we have been friends for so long." We are preoccupied with time!

We are preoccupied with time because our time is limited. When you are young, time isn't so important because you have so much left. That is why you feel OK about wasting time. Your understanding of time changes as you grow older because you feel like your time is running out. That is why you want to spend the time you have left wisely. Wasting time is suddenly a great sin. What intensifies the situation is that time goes fast. In May, I will be sixty years old and I have begun to wonder what I am going to do with the time I have left. Every year, God gives us 365 days to live. Every day, God gives us 24 hours to live. That means we get 1,440 seconds to live each day. If you live to be one hundred years old, then God is giving you 36,500 days to live. Our time is limited. Does anyone here feel like you are spending your time wisely? Does anyone feel like you are wasting time?

Can I ask you a few questions?

1. **How much time do you spend handling your responsibilities?**
Your responsibilities include work, paying bills, cleaning the house and mowing the yard. Our responsibilities take up a great deal of time.
2. **How much time do you spend maintaining your relationships?**
How much time do you spend with your loved ones?

3. **How much time do you spend on your recreational activities?**

That time is important because it is your time. It is not selfish. It is important. Some call it self-maintenance.

4. **How much time do you spend cultivating your relationship with God?**

Perhaps, this is a better question: After your responsibilities, relationships and your recreation, how much time do you have left to cultivate a relationship with God? If that question makes you feel a little uncomfortable, say, **"Amen!"**

Several years ago, Kathryn and I started making road trips with the Cleveland Indians. It is amazing how many Indians fans are out there. Now, when I say traveling with the Indians, I don't mean driving to Pittsburgh. I mean traveling outside of this region to watch baseball. Our first road trip with the Tribe was to Baltimore. The inner harbor area is great. For our twenty-fifth anniversary, we traveled to Boston to watch the Tribe play the Red Sox in historic Fenway Park. It was on my bucket list. Next year, I want to go to Toronto. I hope the roof is open. Someday, I want to travel with the Tribe to Seattle and San Francisco. This year, we went to Washington DC to watch the two-game series against the Nationals. It was the best week of the summer.

It wasn't purely a baseball trip. It was a family trip. My sister Susan traveled with us. Her son, my nephew Jeff, lives in Fairfax, Virginia. He commutes into the capitol every day. He is married to Jen and they have two sons, Quinn and Huck. (I still have a hard time believing Jeff found someone to marry him!) Jeff is an avid Cleveland fan too, and got us tickets to the game. On Tuesday night everyone went, including Jen and the boys. On Wednesday afternoon, it was just the four of us; Jen and the boys stayed home. One of the best things about baseball is the lack of a clock. Time doesn't matter. I do not like being rushed, so baseball is perfect for me. I do not know how much time passed in eighteen innings of baseball and it really doesn't matter. I was away and relaxed. Unlike football, you don't live and die with every play. Baseball is different. Some of the time it is just the backdrop for conversation. Kathryn and I talked about our dreams for the future and our independent daughters. My sister and I talked about things that happened years ago and things that just happened. My nephew and I talked about his life. I think about him as being a kid, but he isn't a kid anymore. He is a man with responsibilities. He has a wife and two sons. They are great parents. He has a good job and owns an overpriced house in the Washington area. I have spent my life watching him grow up, but it was like I was meeting him for the first time. I consider our time in Washington DC, time well spent. How much time do you spend on your relations? This is a harder question:

How much time do you spend cultivating your relationship with God? Time is limited. It takes time to handle your responsibilities. It takes time to handle all your relationships. How much time do you spend with God? We spend our time on the things that are the most important to us. How important is God to you?

Will you pray with me?