

## 10-25-2020      SERMON CCI Psalm 90 Teach Us to Number Our Days

When we were kids, there didn't seem to be enough time to do all the things we liked to do. Going to bed meant we might miss something good. We begged our parents to stay up "just a few more minutes." Recess was always way too short, and doing homework and piano practice took too long.

When we were young adults, there never seemed to be enough time to finish everything we **had to do**, much less what we liked to do. We didn't think much about dying back then, because we had our whole lives ahead of us. There is a sense of unfairness when a young person dies because it feels like they have been robbed of something precious. It's called time.

When we reach our later years, especially after we retire, we have more time to do the things we enjoy. And yet, there can come a time in our lives when we wonder why we're still living, why God doesn't take us home. Ever ask that? A person in their late 80's told me once that "growing old is like a withered autumn leaf, we get all dried up." No matter what our age, we're seldom satisfied with the time we're given- it's either too little or too much.

Autumn is my favorite time of year with its vivid colors and crisp mornings. God created autumn way back in the beginning. Genesis 1 tells us: <sup>14</sup> *And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years."* Spring follows winter, winter follows fall like clockwork. When we see the seasons change every year, we are reminded again and again of God's faithfulness. Autumn in all its beauty reminds us that we can count on God's care for us just like we count on the seasons changing.

Science tells us what God set in motion to bring the brilliant colors we enjoy during autumn. As the days grow shorter, the chlorophyll that makes the leaves green all spring and summer disappears, and the leaves turn to their fall colors. The fall colors were always there in the leaves but were masked by the green. As the nutrition to the leaves decreases in the crisp air, the leaves lose their connection to the branch and fall to the

ground. The purpose of the leaves on the trees is done- their shade is no longer needed, the time for harvest is past, many of the birds have flown south, and the leaves now fall to the ground to nourish the earth around the tree. It is a seasonal process that repeats itself year after year just as God created it to do.

Today's scripture reading from Psalm 90 tells us what the God who created autumn is like:

Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

With God there is no such thing as time as we know it. We can't count the years of God's life; God has always been. It's hard to wrap our heads around this. Our lives have a beginning and an end. Our days begin and end, our hours begin and end. Meals begin and end. We check our clocks to be on time to appointments and jobs and school. But God existed before time was created and God will still be when time ends. From everlasting to everlasting, God is. This psalm describes it this way: 1000 years in our time are like a mere day with God. Or even less, they are like a security watch in the night- only 3-4 hours. Everlasting, always creating, eternal, never-ending that's God.

But that's not us- Psalm 90 describes our lives as "new grass of the morning- though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered." We're like the leaves on the trees that start out green in the spring, only to fall withered to the ground in autumn. Psalm 90 describes our human lives as short- only 70-80 years. Raise your hand if you have outlived 70-80! "We finish our days with a moan." Anyone moan from sore muscles or stiff joints? And all our work to hide our sins, we're fooling ourselves and wasting our time because it's all out in the open to God. If Psalm 90 ended with verse 11, we would have good reason to be pessimistic about life.

But then comes verse 12, the key verse: "Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Numbering sounds like counting in English, but numbering our days does not mean counting how many days we have lived or predicting how many days we have left.

Numbering our days means to accept that life is short so make each day count. Don't put off important stuff- like telling people we love them, forgiving, growing in our relationship with God. Talk to a person who has survived when they should have died- maybe CPR brought them back, or an organ transplant, or a miracle happened- and they will tell you that they have a new view of each day as a gift. They no longer take anything for granted. They stop sweating the small stuff; arguments that used to seem important to win and small irritations lose their significance. Each day is a chance to learn, to experience, to make a difference. It's not the total number of days that matters, it's the living of each day as a gift.

There is a wisdom about living that comes when we understand about dying, that we will die one day. It's a wisdom about what matters, about who and what is important in life, about how we spend our days. It's a wisdom that helps us understand that if nothing on this earth will last forever, then nothing on this earth is worth building our lives around- no things, no fame or wealth, no relationships, no job, not even our health- are worth building our life on. Only our relationship with the everlasting God lasts. We can enjoy our relationships with people and animals, and precious things, even treasure them, but not build our happiness on them.

It's also a wisdom about letting go. How many of us find it hard to let go of things we've collected? Clothes we'll never wear again, books or magazines, knick knacks. Anyone have more plastic containers stored away than you will ever use? Or how many of us are clinging to ideas from the past that don't work anymore because times have changed or clinging to past hurts? Or perhaps we're clinging to regret about something that we cannot change, unable to forgive ourselves. How often we are like the last autumn leaf clinging to the branch as though the life we've known or what we expected life to be can last forever if we just hold on against all change.

So Psalm 90 invites us to learn the wisdom of numbering our days, of recognizing that this life does not last forever, of knowing who and what really matters and what doesn't, of letting go, so we can receive each day as a gift from the God who **does** last forever. Not **counting** our

days, not wishing we had more or less days, but learning to make each day count, even in the midst of changes we don't like. Not just passing the time, but living deeply and fully every day we have.

When I first pondered numbering my days, making each day count, I felt this pressure to always be busy about important stuff- making my to do list for each day, crossing each item off as I finished it. Is that what God wants- for us to be busy, busy, busy? What makes a day count? Here's what I'm learning:

Sometimes numbering my days looks like enjoying a movie or a walk together with Rob, talking and enjoying life together.

Sometimes numbering my days looks like digging into my work of sermon writing and planning worship, multiple ZOOM meetings, calling people to see how their doing, recording worship, and prayer.

Educating myself about what's happening in the world, letting the pain others experience touch and shape me.

Working peacefully in my garden and yard, enjoying God's creation, the feel of weeds letting go, the cat rolling around near me, noticing the little green frogs, and the feel of dirt through my fingers. Listening to life lessons in the garden.

I'm still learning to number my days. Sometimes it looks like doing a lot, sometimes it looks like doing little. ***But all the days that I have numbered share one thing: choosing to be fully present to the gift of that day.***

Friends, we are not able to choose the number of our days, but we do get to choose how we will live each day. May we number our days and thereby gain the wisdom to live and to die well.