The preacher in Ecclesiastes says there is a time for everything under heaven. The question before us today as we continue our sermon series on Aging and Spirituality is simply this: “What time is it now, for Older Adults?” That may seem to be a strange question, since we all have the same 24 hours each day. But time is relative. And our experience of time changes as we age.

When we are young, we are always looking to the future.... the 5 year old, when asked how old they are, may well say, “I’m almost six”, or the 12 year old adolescent will respond “next year I’ll be a teenager”. The preschooler is looking forward to beginning school, the grade schooler to high school, the high schooler to college and graduate school. The graduate student looks forward to career and to family. The mid-career person to retirement. It seems that the first 3/4 of life are lived in part with preparation and anticipation of what comes next. Life, in those years, consists of doing what is necessary, and accumulating what is needed to reach the next level of achievement.

But in retirement that begins to change. The meaning and perception of time shifts for the Older Adult. Demands once placed upon us are no longer present. Now everything is suddenly different. If we continue life in that same pattern of waiting and anticipating what comes next it would mean that we would see our time in life as waiting around to die. And that is unhealthy and dysfunctional.

So let’s look at past, present, and future from the wisdom and perspective that comes with the gift of years.

**PAST**

We have lived through it all, war, loss, pain, the decline of systems, the breakup of relationships, the crises in business, the scarcity of money, the horror of debt, yet here we are. We have not only lived through it all we have survived it. And having survived the swings of fortune in our personal space, in family, in community, in nation and in the world we have gained wisdom and perspective. Nothing is forever ..... a lesson the world needs to learn. ... The only constant is change.

The past for older adults can be a place filled with fond memories of what was, of lives shared, of lessons learned, of success in careers. It can be a pleasant place to visit. On the other hand, it can also be a place of regrets, of paths not chosen, of failures in relationships and missteps in careers. To remain emotionally locked into the past, with nostalgia or regrets, is a prison that robs us from the fullness of life in the present. Whatever our past, success or failure, when we are young it seemed as if everything was dependant upon us. But when we look at the past through the gifts of years, we recognize that much was outside of our personal control. Our lives were much more connected than we realized. We were a part of the whole, a part of a matrix, in which we were only one small piece. We realize that we had little or no control over the forces which shaped our world. We didn’t start wars or economic upheavals, or invent new technology which rendered old technology obsolete. We were simply
participants on the stage of life, playing our part and responding to the world around us with varying amounts of freedom and bondage. In fact, in church, when we confess our sins, it is this bondage to the world that we most often confess. It is what Jesus calls us to turn away from, when he says “Repent and believe in the Good News.” We can feel good about our achievements, but with the wisdom of age, we realize that so much of what we have achieved was the result of circumstances beyond our control.

The myth of the rugged individual who is the captain of their own fate is laid bare. Now we can see that all along we were part of a system, part of the whole, interconnected with all the other parts, whether we choose it or not. Some were blessed and profited from their place in the matrix, while others were penalized by their place. Most of it outside of our control.

We recognize that fairly or unfairly, we have been the recipient of opportunities that others did not endure or enjoy. Sure we put a lot of us into whatever successes we have achieved, but much of that was given. We are the inheritors of culture and society, of economic and political systems. We were born into a particular race, we lived in a stable environment that much of the world only dreams of.

Looking at the past with the wisdom and experience of age, means that we not beat ourselves up over things we could not control, nor think too highly of our achievements, that were the result of so much more than what we put into them.

The past, can either lock us in a prison of resentment and regrets, or it can give fill us with awe and thankfulness for that which we have been given. Certainly there is pride in what we have achieved but there is also a sobering humility in knowing how much we have been given. And part of that sobering reality is that within the systems of this world, often those who benefit within it, do so at the expense of others. Not intentionally, it is simply just the way it is in the matrix of life.

This is one of the reasons why our early years are all about accumulation, and our later years are about giving back. We have come to know the wisdom and the truth of Jesus words which we can now hear, not as law, but as a natural gratitude for the blessings of life. “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”

PRESENT
One of the results of having lived a regime of regularly scheduled days for most our entire life is that we can easily lose the spirit of play. Age is meant to allow us to play— with ideas, with projects, with friends, with life.

It’s true that some feel the pain of being what has been labeled the sandwich generation where we have responsibilities for both agin parents and struggling children. But even this will pass. Then we are free to live the rest of our life discovering who and what we are when no one else has demands upon our time.

There comes a time in our life when there are no more demands for time that we have to meet, we are then free to do that which we choose to do. All the rest of life has been preparing us for this time. We did what we did in all those other years because those were the tasks of life expected of
us then. But now the task of life is, simply, life. What we haven’t lived till now is still waiting for us. Behind every moment the spirit of life, the God of life, waits. Listen! God is calling!

One of the dangers of old age is that we may start acting old. We begin to use age as an excuse for not living fully and becoming all that we can be. “Act your age” can be useful advice when you’re seventeen; it’s a mistake when you’re seventy-seven.

It is proper between the ages of six and twenty-two to get an education. It is proper to have children and raise a family between twenty-two and fifty. It is proper to phase down a professional career sometime between sixty-five and seventy. But then, after that, the only thing that is peculiarly proper to getting older is whatever is going on at the moment.

**FUTURE**

Now there are no more have to’s, no more roles we need to fulfill. Now we get to do whatever it is that we desire to do. But now, there is an immediacy to our time. There is an immediacy because now we live in the awareness of our mortality. Now we can see an end of time for ourselves. And some would argue, that if the lessons from our past are lost, the wisdom of older generations is not shared, then perhaps we can also fathom an end of time for homo sapiens as well. .... But that’s another whole sermon.

The “future,” after seventy, is a state of mind that brings with it the stark realism: that for us, time will not last forever. The certainty of our own mortality therefore becomes a cause to live fully, completely and boldly. Live fully, live joyfully, live dedicated to the passion that is within you. Listen, God is calling! Dedicate the remainder of your life to the cause or causes that matter most to you. For you, the future is now. Today is, and tomorrow may never be.

But this is not an Eat, Drink, and be merry philosophy. This is not build a bigger barn and shut out the rest of the world mentality. Quite the opposite. This is, the time to listen to your passions, your desires, your hopes and dreams for the world and to give yourself over wholly to that fruitfulness that lies within. To risk all that you are, all that you have, to bring that passion within you to life. Listen, God is calling!

Retirement has nothing to do with whether we work or not. The purpose of retirement is not to free us from working. It is to free us from being chained to it like road gangs to gravel beds. Work is meant to be a fulfillment of our very selves and our purpose for being alive. It is a necessary dimension of the spiritual life.

The only question is, what work will we do? And the answer to that is, work at whatever passion lies within. I came out of retirement and back into active ministry, not because I needed a job, not because my life was not full of things to do. I came out of retirement because I have a passion for the transformation of the church. There is a new reformation underway in the Church, we are in a state of change, where it will lead is still unknown, but I believe it leads to renewal, for us and for our world, and I wish to be part of that. So at almost 70, I still study, I still read, I still engage in the process of trying to interpret the way of Jesus to a world desperately in need of transformation.

What will be the crowning fruit of your life? What legacy will you leave behind? Great or small, what is your passion in life? What needs to be done where we
are? Get involved. Live life fully. These years are for the development of the soul. These are the years we learn to paint, or go back to playing an instrument again, or become a Little League coach, or visit nursing homes so that the people there, so many of them alone in the world, have someone to talk to about important things.

To insist on living until we die may be one of life’s greatest virtues. What it does not mean is that we will become accustomed, happy even, with allowing ourselves to go to seed, to grow dry and brittle from the inside out.

What it does mean is that we will engage life fully, we will live large, we will listen to our passions and discover what it is that keeps us laughing, and keeps us happy in the here and now. And it is in the here and now that we will spend the final stage of life. For Older Adults, the future is now.

Jesus said: I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, ... If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ... I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

I end as I began with the question: What time is it now for Older Adults? Now is the time for fruitfulness, Now is the time of our flowering. For this we were created. Listen, God is calling. For this we live our lives. For this we commit all that we have and all that we are, spending all, emptying ourselves so that God may be glorified and that our joy may be complete. Listen, God is calling!