

# The Gift of more Time ...

## ... *use it well*

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*The sermon given at the Watch Night Service by the Vicar, the Revd. Canon Jonathan Baker, on 31 December 2019, in Beverley Minster.*

Well as the new year approaches, we shall soon be looking at our watches and counting down the minutes to midnight and in town squares all over the country, people will count down the last seconds of 2019 - it's as if that moment when 2020 arrives is of some great significance. Of course we weren't always able to do it so precisely: in my last church there was preserved the mechanism of a medieval clock that still worked, but it was very different from a modern clock: in the first place, it had no clock face so you couldn't actually see the time - you just had to listen to the bells striking; and in the second place it only chimed every half an hour, so it told you the precise time only twice an hour. And you might think that doesn't sound very useful: you can't catch a train or keep an appointment if your watch is only accurate to the nearest half an hour. But it was perfectly accurate enough for the Benedictine monks who had it made: they just needed a clock that would tell them when it was time to pray. So when the clock struck at the third hour and then at the sixth and then at the ninth and so on, marking the different points through the monastic day when the community gathered to pray together, they would stop whatever it was they were doing and head for the church to pray, and to offer the next set of prayers through the day. So the clock had a special function: it told the monks to **stop** working; to **stop** studying; to **stop** labouring in the kitchen; to **stop** being productive and useful; and to sit down and pray.

And that's the complete opposite of how we use clocks nowadays: we live in a 24/7 world where clocks are essential to help us fit more in; the more accurate our watches, the more we try to do; the more detailed and universal our timekeeping, the less time we feel we have. As a visiting African bishop once said, "You Europeans have *watches*, but we Africans have *time*." So the more carefully we manage our time, the more we try to do, and the more we give in to the illusion of being able to

order every detail of our lives and as a result, the more stressed we become. The clock which began as a servant to the soul, as a summons to surrender the illusion of control and give ourselves instead to prayer, has now become a demanding taskmaster squeezing out the last remaining spaces for prayer, for reflection and solitude, in order that we can be more active, more useful and get more done.

But the great thing about celebrating the new year is that it's the celebration of the gift of more time, another 365 days: it's a finite gift and we shouldn't assume it will always be there. But it's as if the dials are being reset and we're invited to reflect upon our use of time. So I wonder what will be your priorities in 2020? How will you balance the demands of your work and responsibilities with the need to invest in your relationships? To simply hang out and waste time, with your family, with your friends and yes, with God.

Let's not squander the coming year in the rush simply to acquire and possess more, at the expense of those we love and at the expense of our own self-awareness, which only grows when we take the space to reflect.

A better life is full of wonder, contemplation, sensitivity and openness to others and the world around us - a better life in short, is full of love. And such qualities only grow when we give them time, even though their growth can't be measured and the time we invest in them can often feel unproductive, at least in the sense of having anything tangible to show for it - it is if you like a 'waste' of time.

But there is no point in measuring time if we don't know how to use it well. So may you use the 365 days of 2020 to discover the gift of Eternity: finding the eternal in the present moment.

May the Lord who lives outside of time set you free from its tyranny and enable you to live well, to live a better life, to flourish within all the limits of our time-bound lives

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... and have a very Happy New Year.