**1 Corinthians 7:29-31** January 25, 2015

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Epiphany 3

*1Co 7:29 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; 30 those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; 31 those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 Many people have said it. We experienced it. One of the great things about moving is that you get to throw out so much junk. All those useless things just sitting out in the shed or even right in the middle of your living room for years, you can throw them in the garbage and not feel bad about it. That old two-man saw, clothes that haven’t fit for a decade, 14 year old magazines you never looked at even when they came in the mail in 2001 – they all get a one-way ticket to the Thursday morning trash pick-up. You get to re-draw the lines, start with a clean slate. And this time, *this* time, you are going to keep your priorities straight. You are going to

**Put First Things First**

 Just as surely as moving won’t permanently cure those sorts of problems, becoming a Christian doesn’t magically make us people with right priorities. We need to keep on re-drawing the lines, throwing out the useless junk.

Part I. Put First Things First, Because the Time Is Short

 ***“What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short!”*** (29). The end is near and we need to be ready. In a sports competition, when the time is nearly up, everyone gets very concerned about the score—and for good reason. On November 6, 1869 (145 years ago), what is considered the first competitive football game was played. Scoring was different them. In that game Rutgers College beat Princeton 6-4. That score will stand forever. A thousand years from now, if God should allow the world to remain that long, that score will be unchanged. It is unchangeable. Princeton will forever be the losers. ***“Brothers, the time is short!...This world in its present form is passing away”*** (29,31). The clock is ticking down. The final buzzer is Jesus coming at the end of the world. Whether you are God’s child or not at the end of your life will have results that cannot be changed.

 That is why the Apostle Paul urges us with such earnestness. He probably does a far better job than I do. I think that there is always tomorrow. As the sun rose yesterday, so it will rise in the morning. “I am working on it, God. One of these days I will get it right.”

 Thank the Lord we age. As we age, we begin to hear the ticking clock. Usually we don’t when we are young. As the body starts to not work so well, as family and friends depart this life, we begin to hear the clock. That is part of why we act differently when they get older. We start to realize that the time really is short, even if it is 80 years, even if it is 110 years. It is short.

 Recently a prominent radio personality reflected on the fact that he was near retirement age. He claimed he had never given a thought to his aging. But just recently he became aware that, in his words, “Not all my dreams are going to come true.” Without much thinking of it, he had always treated his dreams as though there was a real possibility they could happen. But in his seventh decade, he was starting to realize some were impossible. The time was too short.

 Less frequently, but just as truly, the ticking clock breaks into the lives of young people. Most of us, before we were 20, went to school with a child or youth who passed away. Do you remember your classmate who had leukemia, or the high school basketball star whose heart defect suddenly showed itself when he went up for a lay-up in practice? Whatever tragedy was associated with those people, there is also a gracious God reminding us all, ***“The time is short… This world in its present form is passing away.”*** God reminds us to put first things first. Where we stand at the end of life does make a difference.

 That is why Jesus is so important. Only he is the way, the truth and the life. Only in Jesus’ payment for our sins can we look forward to eternity in joy. So we stay close to him.

 God’s goal in all things is that things turn out well. Think about a parent who reminds a child to get an important assignment done. The child views it as nagging. But the parent’s desire is nothing other than the good of the child, that they would put first things first.

 All that a pastor or elder says whether in a sermon or a personal visit is with the same goal. We don’t like pressuring people and we don’t like people pressuring us. But if left to our own devices, what would our priorities look like?

 Let us put First Things First so that we may be prepared for that last moment of life.

Part II: Put First Things First, Not Distracted by Earthly Things

 If you have become familiar with the life of Jesus, you know that he did that to. He directed people to keep First Things First. When one man came and asked what he should do, Jesus told him to sell what he had and give it to the poor. Now remember, Jesus did not tell every rich person to do that. But Jesus could look into *that* man’s heart and see what was confusing him. And for that man, it was his wealth.

 And if Jesus could look into our hearts, he could say something like that to all of us. Maybe it would be a pursuit of wealth. Or maybe social media, or talking, or gaming, or quilting. That is one of the hallmarks of humanity: there is always something we do in excess. And sometimes it is ridiculous things that make the rest of us say, “Really?!?”

 These misplaced priorities are sin. We often pawn them off as weaknesses, but they are sin. They are sin because these things cause us to sin against our neighbor or our God. Too much time at work can be at the expense of our family. Child and Family Services won’t come knocking, but God knows. Too much going out having a good time comes at the expense of our offernigs to God, both in time and money.

 And the long-term problem with it is that it can have long-term results. That is why this congregation and pastor care. Rarely do people fall from faith in a single moment. Falling from faith is usually an accumulation of bad spiritual habits. Less time at church, more attention to worldly things snowballs. It grows. At some point it reaches a point of no return. I don’t know when that is; only God knows. But God has told us to keep people away from that tipping point.

 So Paul urges us to keep first things first. He says, ***“From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none…”*** Did he just say what I think he said? It sounds like he just said married people shouldn’t pay much attention to their marriages.

 You have all watched news reports. Those things scare me. Think about it. If someone gives a two hour press conference, the media picks out the juiciest 2 ½ seconds and repeats it every 30 minutes for all the world to hear. I mean, if I had an interview like that, they could make me sound like a holocaust denier, or a raving lunatic, or even a Chicago Bears fan.

 That is what happens with the Apostle Paul here. People take these three verses out of the 40 verse long press release of 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Now, we don’t have time to go through the whole thing, so let me sum up. In this chapter Paul is talking about marriage. His point is that whether a person marries or decides to say single, he or she should first of all think about their relation with Jesus.