

I grew up with Daylight Saving Time. Now that I reside in Arizona I don't have to 'spring' forward or 'fall' back an hour. But, I keep thinking California is an hour behind us. I must confess that I have had trouble with Daylight Saving Time so it's probably good that I live here.

When I was nearing completion of seminary I took a couple of weeks off after passing my ordination exams. I headed for a family home in Illinois by myself. I looked forward to some overdue rest. I went to church the first Sunday. As I walked in the vestibule the ushers were just finishing serving communion. One of them, a relative of my wife, looked at me with a funny smile. He asked, "You come for church?" "Yes," I replied knowing something was wrong. "We started an hour ago... You forget to turn your clock forward?"

I laughed a little, quite embarrassed. He said half-jokingly, but it still hurt, "And you're studying to be in the ministry?" I swallowed my pride and went into church for the last hymn and benediction.

Imagine going to bed on a Friday, **October 4**, and waking up the next morning to discover that it is **October 15!** Something like this actually happened 433 years ago. Our ancestors in England, France, Italy, Germany and any place which followed the Julian calendar, went to bed on **October 4, 1582**, and got up to smell the coffee on **October 15, ten days later.**

Actually, no days were lopped off anybody's lifespan, but the date gap occurred nonetheless. The loss of days was the result of a Papal bull issued by Pope Gregory XIII to reform the Julian calendar, then in use. His goal was to make the calendar match events of the solar and lunar cycles necessary for calculating the date of Easter each year. Yes, there is some science in our faith.

Pope Gregory set the calendar so that the vernal equinox was always near March 21, where it had been during the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. This adjustment required removing 10 days of "*drift*" that had accumulated in the years since (because a Julian year, at 365.25 days/year), was slightly longer than an actual year).

Initially, the Gregorian calendar, named after Pope Gregory XIII, only covered the Catholic Church and the Papal States, but gradually, it was adopted almost universally for practical reasons, including international communication, transportation and commerce. We remain on the Gregorian calendar this day. Each year is actually 365.25 days, so that in the 4th year, Leap Year, we add one day, on Feb. 29th to make things work out. Even in Arizona.

The 10-day gap in 1582 was a paper loss only, but periodically, we feel that we've actually *lost time*. When a loved one dies, we get through it, but a few months or years later we ask ourselves "Where has time gone?" If you've ever been hit with a serious illness, even the "stomach flu," you know what it means for

your life to be put on hold for a week or longer. Have you ever made a wrong turn, headed in the wrong direction, only to retrace all that distance and time before you can make renewed progress towards your destination? In addition, we feel like time is irretrievably lost when we have to wait in security lines at the airport, or in lines at the post office, or waiting for the doctor or dentist.

In each of these examples, there can be a sense that time has been lost forever, squandered, and taken from us. That's not a pleasant realization, when we ponder the finite boundaries of our lifetime and realize that those "lost" days are not a paper loss, **but is time that is really gone, never to be recovered.**

In the first chapter of Joel and early in this second chapter, the prophet writes about a devastating invasion of locusts, which swarmed both the crops in the field and the people in their houses. These locust invasions lasted for several years. Joel writes the invasion was symbolic of the judgment of God. He prophesies the people of God need to repent, put themselves before God's mercy.

Today's passage speaks about *loss, repentance, redemption*, about *trusting* in God and *belonging* to God; very "**reformed**" ideas. And it anticipates the time when Israel will repent. I suppose we anticipate the time when our nation will repent; when America will be restored to its former glory and be transformed to the great beacon of freedom and democracy which our history attests and which we'll all celebrate next weekend.

Maybe we anticipate repenting something from our personal lives that we've kept hidden away down inside the deep recesses of our soul. It's there and we don't want to stir it up – it's too frightening, even though it may have added to our feeling of lost time. Have you lost time due to devastating personal news? I wonder how many people repent during the dry years; the lost years of their lives.

Our scripture indicates that the people **repented** for the autumn rains began to bring a new crop, which filled the lives of the people with plenty once again. The beginning of autumn rains was the time for the planting of cereal crops, which were harvested in the spring. Israel was an agrarian culture - their livelihood depended upon rain. The rains symbolize God's mercy and faithfulness!

For Israel, redemption came in the abundance of food. For America our harvests are generally plentiful and have fed much of the world. How proud we are of America's ability to feed our nation and others. Our nation experienced the Dust Bowl and the Depression, and yet, America was redeemed. Joel says, "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied" (vv. 26b-27).

In the past few days we've had our first monsoon rains of the season. What a delight! Have you ever experienced an abundant rain in your life? What I mean is, have you ever experienced God's faithfulness and mercy in your life that blessed you in a way you had not expected? I hope the monsoon season will be a symbol of God's mercy and faithfulness for each of us and for our country.

Joel is talking about **lost time**. “**I will restore to you the years**” (v. 25a); **the years lost to storms, devastation, sickness, injury, and death**.

Certainly the prophet Joel and his fellow citizens of Judah knew the experience of lost time. They had seen a massive swarm of locusts sweep across their fields, devouring not only the crops they counted on for their own nourishment, but every shred of grain that might have fed their flocks. While we don't have details of the infestation, we know that during a similar locust invasion in Palestine in 1915, the insatiable insects plowed across the ground at a rate of 400-600 feet per day, or about 1 ½-2 football fields, devouring every scrap of vegetation in their path.

Joel and his countrymen viewed the plague as divine judgment, and it caused them to **repent** and turn towards God. This resulted in the ending of the infestation, along with God's promise to **restore** the land. God says that abundant rain will fall and that their threshing floors will be full of grain again. And then he says, “I will **repay** you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you” (v. 25).

Of course, God wasn't saying he would actually give them back the time the locust took; God was not giving them a do-over. The sense of what God is saying is, “I will give you back what you lost in crops and vegetation, in your sense of

well-being, and in your relationship with me.” The actual time lost, however, was gone for good.

But is lost time actually lost? Can we actually say that time has been taken from us when, in fact, we did live those days, even if it was in circumstances we didn't like or that halted our forward momentum? John Lennon famously said, “Life is what happens while you're busy making other plans,” but it's also what happens when we're enduring forced downtime; lying in a hospital bed, waiting out bad weather or contemplating what the “locusts” have eaten out of our life.

In other words, “life happens” not just in our productive hours and fun times, but in every tick of the clock. No doubt, those of us who love accomplishing things find “lost “ time especially frustrating. We want to recapture those hours, days, years spent on something we now regret, a troubled relationship, a dead end job, a health crisis which we could no longer ignore. That's what we want to **redeem**.

Malcolm Gladwell is a bestselling author writing about the unexpected things which occur in social sciences research. He has a new book out titled, *“David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Act of Battling Giants.”*

In his book, Gladwell found that many who had suffered disadvantages; traumatic childhoods, disabilities or who had suffered losses,(I might add here, even “lost time”), these circumstances may provide an incentive, along with their

faith, for that person to rise above their disadvantage and succeed, much like David did against Goliath.

In his research and writing of this book, Gladwell admits that he had forgotten the Christian faith of his youth; he had lost time, and only began to **rediscover** it through this writing. The lessons learned from “lost time” can be **redemptive**. To whatever degree the experiences of those years contribute, even if by negative example, to one’s spiritual development, **they are hardly wasted**.

British journalist and author Malcolm Muggeridge, who became a Christian in late life, titled his autobiography *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. But when you read that book, you discover that as he reflected on how he’d spent his time, very little of it was wasted in the sense of truly being “lost.”

We suspect that’s how God intends it. So-called lost time is useful for coming to our self, for making sense of our life, for maturing spiritually, for progressing and for listening to God’s word for us. Sometimes it is in our “lost time” **where we return to God – where we repent – where we are redeemed**. In that sense, God does offer us back the time we once considered lost. Joel says, “I will restore to you the years lost.” How has God **repaid** you for your lost time? Amen.