

**July 31, 2022 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23,**  
**Colossians 3:1-11, Luke 12:31-21**

[Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals, by Oliver Burkeman]

## **READ GOSPEL**

**Grace and peace to you, from the One who was, the One who is, and the One who is to come. Amen.**

**I have been chuckling** to myself all week, that this week, of all weeks,  
the readings would begin with Ecclesiastes' words: Vanity of vanities.

For you see, one of the many things on my mind over these last 3 months of Sabbatical, indeed, 13 weeks,  
has been finding a vanity for our relatively small bathroom.

Vanity of vanities.

I've been measuring and browsing,

finally deciding,

crossing my fingers that it was going to work,

that it would arrive in one piece,

that the good fellow, Kevin, who often helps us with handyman projects beyond our doing...

would indeed say 'yes' to installing this vanity.

I literally sent Kevin an email not so many weeks back with just this subject: vanity of vanities.

And here we are.

## **We are here.**

I am so glad to be back with you today.

Sabbatical has been good, very good. Thank you.

Needed space to breathe.

Important time to think new thoughts to,

to not think,

to go a bit slower,

to focus on my family and only my family, our home,

our need for insulation in our walls and ceiling, the vanity!

Luscious time to travel with each person in my family

(my spouse Jane, our 13 year old, our 8 year old, my mom, my dad),

one to one, just the two of us,

exploring, seeing a bit of the world,

satisfying my travel bug and my people love.

Sweet time to reconnect with friends from so many parts of my life,  
people who have shaped me.

Restful time to lose myself in a few novels,  
to hike and walk and rest and pray.

I will share more in the coming weeks, I promise.

**I'm glad to be back:**

to hear your stories, the goodness, the pain, the hope, the struggle,  
the faithful wisdom of our leaders,  
the care of Pastors Tom and Erik and Maria,  
the diligence of our staff.

The notes that many of you have left for me on the bright papers (I think they are available again this week),  
they have been so wonderful—catching me up, welcoming me back, affirming my time.

Goodness, in that bunch of notes there's a song, a confession, a Haiku poem.

So, so good. Thank you.

**Through these 13 weeks** I've felt the perennial internal tug:

at once trying to rest and renew and NOT do,  
and, at the same time this tremendous opportunity to DO the things that I've been wanting to do,  
needing to do,  
the things I just never quite have time to do when the pace speeds up.

I know that tug, indeed, that tension, and I suspect many of you do too.

Vanity of vanities, chasing after the wind, writes Ecclesiastes.

**In Luke's gospel, there's the real question of inheritance**

and then Jesus' parable about the one who would build bigger barns,  
rent more storage,  
clean their closets with the hope of more efficiently stashing their stuff:

This very night your life is being asked of you.

What of all your stuff?

What of your fretting?

What of the inward bend of our life when we focus so on things? And our eye cannot see beyond?

Where, truly where, does our treasure lie?

**Between Ecclesiastes' talk of time and toil, and Luke's focus on possessions, stuff,**

*my hyper sensitive ears hear judgment in these readings.*

Goodness, I know the tensions of time, I've spent my share of time focused on stuff.

But when I can get past myself, when I can let the conviction work it's gospel grace in me, for us,

there's a gentler and ever-vital tone in these honest truths.

Is life meant to be curled in on itself?

Fretting about things, stressing about time?

Or, Beloved, maybe, maybe these days that we have, these weeks,

can be used differently, opened outward, aware of God, held in grace.

**At the recommendation of a good friend** I've been listening to an audio book by Oliver Burkeman called

Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals.

My spouse Jane reminds me how very Benedictine is his premise.

This week we may even say, Lukan, for it sounds a bit like Luke's gospel, and also our reading from

Ecclesiastes

Oliver Burkeman begins: "The average human life span is absurdly, terrifyingly, insultingly short....

Assuming you live to be eighty," he writes, "you'll have had about 4000 weeks."

Then he quips: "Certainly, you might get lucky, make it to 90, and you'll have had about 4,700 weeks."

He writes about the reality that our life span has limits, we are mortal, we will die.

Our time management is less about trying to get everything accomplished (we won't),

and, rather, more about making choices, faithful choices, about how we use the time we have.

**4000 weeks.**

Thinking of these last 13 weeks, this sabbatical time, with a different intention,

has focused me in a new way on goals, hopes, routines, needs, joys, rest.

It's focused me on the choices I and we must make daily, weekly, yearly.

How will you use THIS week? What choices will we make?

Where can God's grace lead us if we let it?

How will we be outward facing, not curled into ourselves,

for I believe that's Jesus' concern in today's gospel?

Instead, how will we (as humans and as this community) be open to God, to one another,

to the strife and joy around us?

4000 weeks, my friends, 4000 weeks.

**Late last week, Pastor Marlene Whiterabbit Helgemo journeyed on, she died at the age of 75.**

Pastor Marlene is Ho Chunk and her Ho Chunk name is Voice Above All Others.

For 30 years she's led All Nations Indian Church, a UCC congregation in south Minneapolis,

Before that, from 1987 to 1992, Marlene was a pastor here at Hope.

Pastor Marlene was the first Native American Woman ordained

in the strands of the church that became the ELCA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Pastor Marlene was co-founder of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition.

She was a wise and strong leader in Indian Country,

and a national leader in the ELCA

as well as the United Church of Christ.

As we do when someone who is part of this community dies, or at the death of one who's been key in

shaping *this* community of faith, today I'll share a little about Pastor Marlene and then we'll pray.

**Marlene was born in Portage, Wisconsin** and grew up along the sacred south shore of Lake Superior.

Pastor Marlene was a trusted connector, linking people, inviting us to cross boundaries, leading with love,

lifting up the underdog, seeing in us our full potential, healing the pain.

I was grateful that many from Hope were present at Marlene's beautiful funeral this week, with its drums

and smudging and music.

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan offered a profound eulogy recalling

Marlene's ever-present purple eye shadow;

her big laugh;

her directive, bossy way that got things organized;

and the need, now, for others to be the aunties.

**I've enjoyed hearing stories from some** of you who were around during those years Pastor Marlene was

here at Hope.

Karen Westwood told me of being a young mom with a new baby.

It was Pastor Marlene who visited with plenty of ideas for getting out and about, beyond herself.

When Marlene invited Karen to a multi-day conference to stop pro sports teams from using Native mascots,

Karen hesitated: a conference, with a baby?

Marlene nudged her: Native people aren't afraid of babies, you have nothing to be concerned about!

4000 hours and so many choices.

Pastor Marlene knew that, she lived it.

**Pastor Mark Hanson and Marlene** teamed up in ministry during those years at Hope.

Mark shared the memories of his son, Aaron who was a teenager back then.

“She took us to Pine Ridge South Dakota and Turtle Mountain in North Dakota, to a Pow Wow on the Canadian border.”

“Every time we went to one of these places, we were immediately welcomed and accepted.”

Pastor Marlene was all about welcome, belonging, acceptance, leveling injustice.

She embodied grace, and had a way of infusing community with authentic hospitality .

**Pastor Marlene leaves a big and vital community, her congregation, her relatives.**

especially her husband Harvey, daughters Wendy and Heidi, and two grandchildren.

**At these times of death,**

we remember how the waters that first wash over us in baptism, hold us still in death.

We pray at the baptismal waters, linking ourselves to God’s powerful waters of promise.

**Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our sister Marlene Faye Whiterabbit Helgemo, Voice Above All Others. We thank you for giving her to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. At the waters of baptism, you welcomed her into your love. At these waters, you comforted her in times of trouble and encouraged her in delight. At these waters, you now enfold her into Jesus’ death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with all the saints of God. In Jesus’ mercy we pray. Amen.**