

Making Friends with Time

A joint sermon by the Revs. Robert and Makaanah Morriss

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Bob:

Making Friends with Time seems like such a wonderful idea, that when Makaanah and I encountered a book by that title, it seemed too good to resist. Of course it didn't hurt that in the forward Thich Nhat Hanh wrote: "This book is for mindful and joyful living. ...When you read, you know that living happily in the present moment is something possible for everyone."

The authors begin with a quotation from Emerson: "The only way to have a friend is to be one." And they go on to say: "Becoming friends with time calls upon the same skills we use to build friendships with people. We meet. We create opportunities to get better acquainted. We have changes and challenges that test our friendship. For the sake of the friendship, we commit to keeping our hearts open, our integrity strong, and our risk muscles flexed. We grow in understanding and appreciation of each other and celebrate the opportunity to be together. We know how blessed we are when casual acquaintances bloom into lifelong friendships. To experience time as a friend, we take the same journey."

Now I'll have to admit that the subject of time has been very much on my mind lately. As I have aged, and experienced myself functioning more slowly, my frustration in meeting my expectations of myself as to how much I should be able to accomplish in a given unit of time has increased to the point that frequently I have seen time more as an adversary than as a friend.

I'm aware that this time-tension has been one of the things that has figured into Makaanah's and my decision to retire. In writing to an older cousin in Virginia, who has been retired for several years now, about my fantasies concerning what I would get to do when I got to Virginia and "had more time" I was impressed by her response that in fact I would not have more time. While I might enjoy how I spent part of it more, the quantity of time in any given day was not going to increase.

She is right of course. Sequential time, - the type that is now measured in nanoseconds, is always passing, and can even seem to be "running out." But sequential time is not the only time there is. There is also cyclical time, measured in phases of the moon, the planting and harvesting of crops, holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, sunrises, sunsets, and all sorts of events that occur again and again with each new recurrence offering the opportunity for fresh and renewing experiences in a familiar context.

And then there is soul time, timeless time, when we are so fully in the present moment that it

transcends the measurement of time. Making friends with time requires that we stay connected with all three kinds of time in ways that support, sustain, and inspire us.

Accomplishing this requires practice. In *Making Friends with Time* the authors offer a number of daily practices divided into different sections, the first of which is labeled “Awakening Time.” In this section, one exercise in particular caught my attention. The exercise is titled “Affirm your Desire” and their description begins with a quotation from Chief Joseph, Nez Perce, “It does not require many words to speak the truth.”

The desire we are invited to affirm is our belief about time. Since my unconscious belief so often seems to be “there’s not enough time,” I find it useful to replace this with an affirmation that better fits how I want it to be. The authors suggest, “Time is on my side” as something that has worked for them. In thinking about it I came up with, “There is always enough time to interact with kindness and compassion” as my response to my too hurried state of mind. Think about it. What might your affirmation about time be?

## **Makanah**

“Making friends with time requires us to value the time it takes to take care of ourselves.”  
(*Making Friends with Time*, p. 25)

In their book, Tracy Sarriguarte and Peggy Ward devote an entire section to the concept they call “Nourishing Time,” time devoted to honoring and nurturing our body and soul.

Our body is the vehicle that helps us travel through time. We are all well aware that the body functions as an integrative community and thus when one part is disrupted, blocked, or injured, the whole system experiences the imbalance.

We can access our body wisdom by stopping and really listening to what our body has to say.  
(*Making Friends With Time*, p.28)

We may have conversations with our bodies, but in truth often these may be more like lectures as many of us have a list in our minds of what we’d like our bodies to look like, feel like, be able to do. We push and prod our bodies to keep on going when our bodies know better. And in this pushing and prodding, our friendship with nourishing time definitely suffers.

To enhance our body-time relationship, there are several things we can do.

(1) We can take a few moments to listen to the voice of our body. Regular communication with our body will enhance our ability to hear early on when something is out of balance or going wrong so that we can take effective remedial and healing action. What action can I take today to show my body that I am listening?

If your body were to write you a letter, what would it say? I tried this experiment and here's what I came up with. "Dear Makaanah, I am pretty tired right now. I need more rest. I like the new weight training we are doing but I do not like the pace of our days. I need a flow day, a day to be slow and without anything to 'do.'" Hmm...

(2) Loving the body we each have is also important. Many of us are very adept at looking in the mirror and doing an instant multi-point critique of every aspect we see. We spend much more time on our negative feelings about our bodies instead of affirming the positive and expressing our gratitude for all that our body does and offers us.

Thich Nhat Hanh suggests a practice where you thank each part of your body for its presence and its work on your behalf starting with your toes. So the next time you take a shower, try it out. Look down at your toes and thank them. And see what that feels like or what occurs to your mind and cosmic soul as you do this.

A very basic exercise is to think of one thing you like about your body and experience your appreciation for this. Give it a try. Right now, think of one thing you like about your body. And silently thank your body. Good.

(3) Taking a 15-20 minute siesta during the day is yet another way to experience "nourishing time."

"We (can definitely) learn from cats—the more naps you take, the more awakenings you experience." (Sarah Ban Breathnach) Cats are experts at naps. If you have a cat at home watch either as it enters the nap-zone or awakens from a nap. Entering is a letting go, diving deeply into sleep, and then mindful awakening is a gentle stretching and being ready for what's next.

We need to be awake, alert and well-rested if we want to have the time of our lives. Many of us do not get the amount of sleep we really need and a 15-20 minute nap during the day can help refresh us.

(4) Giving ourselves a "lazy day" at least once a month is likewise important. A "lazy day" is a day about consciously relaxing and experiencing ease without a to-do list, a constant eye on the clock, a nagging sense of guilt. It is instead a purposeful day of mindfulness – mindful meals, mindful and perhaps simpler activities, mindful reading and reflection. It is a day committed to honoring the flow of time in a soul nurturing way.

And (5) one of the most important ways to engage in "nourishing time" is to pursue activities which allow our inner creative selves, our inner artists to emerge -- things like cooking or gardening, carpentry, knitting, sewing, drawing. Kafka wrote, "Art should be the ax for the frozen sea within us."

Have you thought you might like to learn how to string beads or make jewelry? Does writing or poetry appeal to you? What does your heart and soul yearn to try "if only you had the time?" Taking time for creativity is a practice that honors our unique inner expression, as it also transforms

our experience of time, helps our soul stay healthy and is just plain fun! (Sarriugarte & Ward, p. 49)

One of my favorite sections of the *Making Friends With Time* book was the section on “shifting time.”

Gabrielle Roth, dancer and teacher, in her book, *Maps to Ecstasy*, suggests that there are “five sacred rhythms” in our daily experience of life: flow, staccato, chaos, lyrical and rest. Flow, staccato, chaos, lyrical and rest. These five rhythms remind us that life is dynamic and always changing. We naturally move through these five rhythms all the time just by being alive.

And the good news is that we can become conscious of which rhythm we are engaging in currently and we can choose to shift between rhythms as we need to. Breathing, mindful breathing, can help us make such transitions.

The more challenging rhythms do happen – chaos may have been the rhythm experienced by many of our Church Auction Volunteer Team yesterday as the start time for Service Auction approached. And yet the things that needed to get done, got done and the things that did not really need to get done, dropped away and a VERY good time was had by all.

Handling the “chaos” rhythm so abundant in our Western society and not permitting it to take over our lives is most definitely a spiritual and life practice for us all. To be sure, chaos can be creative and productive but it is a tempo which needs to be experienced in limited amounts!

One of the most profound learnings I have experienced came from an amazing horseman named Bob Olson. Bob is an expert at teaching driving – how to drive a single or team of horses. But more than that, he is a very grounded, centered and compassionate human being. His core teaching is that with horses “Slow is fast.” “Slow is fast.” If you move mindfully and thus more slowly you will accomplish your goal in working with your horse. The faster you move, the more likely you are to startle or confuse your horse companion and this will interfere with your work together.

“Slow is fast” is actually an excellent motto for most aspects of life. I carry it with me in my head and my heart along with the energy memory of how Bob Olson interacted with both people and horses. He is very present, very calm, very compassionate and has a gentle sense of humor. Slow is fast allows all these aspects to be present in his interactions.

The chapter in the *Making Friends With Time* book that really caught my eye was the one entitled “Retire from Rushing.” Now I am a real expert at planning how to pack a great deal into any given day. I usually do not accomplish all that I plan but at least at the beginning of the day my “Puritan self” feels like this looks like it just could be a day “well spent.” And so the rushing begins. And the results are never even. For sure there are aspects and tasks that get accomplished well, some that just get accomplished and some that seem to flee and hide as my harried self approaches!

We are most definitely a culture addicted to speed, multi-tasking and seeing just how quickly things can happen. This is not healthy day in and day out for ourselves, those we love, or our world! People from more laid-back cultures

often look at us in amusement – why are we running all the time.

Remember the old Crocodile Dundee movies? One of the most engaging aspects was Crocodile Dundee's sense of bemusement as he tried out some of our rush-rush behaviors when he arrived in New York City for the first time, a significant change from his more regular environment of the Australian outback.

He took the time to speak to people he encountered, the doorman, the maid, and others who were not used to anyone really noticing them. He did not “buy” into rush as the only way to be. And his centeredness and more deliberate but not rigid pace and rhythm made it possible for him to mindfully and with good humor chose how to react.

By “retiring from constant rushing,” we can most certainly develop a rich and rewarding relationship with time.

**Bob:**

Another section of the book is entitled Enlightening Time, and it has to do with laughing, having fun, jumping for joy, appreciating life, playing, doing silly things, and watering the seeds of happiness. There is an Arabic proverb that reads: “Write the wrongs that are done to you in sand, but write the good things that happen to you on a piece of marble. Let go of all emotions such as resentment and retaliation, which diminish you, and hold onto the emotions such as gratitude and joy, which increase you.”

The practice of watering the seeds of happiness can be as simple as making a list of the things that make you happy and then giving yourself a 15 minute “happiness break” periodically, in which you choose something from your list and deliberately indulge yourself. I can virtually guarantee you that you will more than make up for the “lost time” both in increased productivity, and in longevity thus getting at least double the time back over the course of your life.

Another section of the book is entitled “Connecting Time.” My favorite exercise from this section is “Taking a Reverence Walk.” Now I'll have to admit that normally I am one of these people who is known for their rapid walk. When there are things to be done, I enjoy getting them done efficiently, and that often means minimizing the time it takes me to get from one location of activity to the next. While I'm sometimes told I look hurried or somewhat frazzled when I'm doing this, I usually don't feel that way. I am enjoying the sensation of rapid movement and I feel efficient – which is something I like about myself.

On a reverence walk however, the act of walking and time are experienced from a very different perspective. The object of the walk is not to get somewhere, but to experience what life has to offer and say to us from whatever attracts our attention. If we are open it might be a tree, a flower, a stone, a bird, or a squirrel that we find ourselves attending to. And if we stay open, we may find

ourselves learning amazing things from the simple process of listening to an unexpected source of wisdom.

If you have trouble listening to the natural world, it may help to remember the words of George Washington Carver, who said, “If you love it enough, anything will talk to you.”

### **Makanah:**

The final aspect of developing our friendship with time is attending to the concept of “deepening time.” Ama Ata Aidoo writes, “Time by itself means nothing, no matter how fast it moves, unless we give it something to carry for us, something we value.”

Deep time is rich and alive with meaning and substance. The beauty of nature, imagination, paradox, the sense of transcendence and timelessness all deepen our experience of time. It is time that is meant to be treasured. As we who pursue the liberal religious path know, the experience of deep time, soul time, is most definitely available in both ordinary and extraordinary moments.

Allow yourself to slip into timelessness as you pursue an activity you deeply love. Block off a significant period of time when you do not need to track the passing hours and just let yourself become thoroughly immersed in doing something that feeds your heart and soul.

Embracing paradox is another important practice for helping us to “deepen time.” We of the liberal religious bent are really quite good at embracing paradox as we are committed to honoring the truth that there are many perspectives on any given situation or topic. “Either – or” is just too limiting and not true to life’s flow.

As Bob and I prepare for retirement, I practice embracing paradox every day – feeling sad about leaving this wonderful congregation and each of you and also looking forward to a more relaxed pace, and a freer schedule when retirement arrives. It is not either/or; it is both feelings held very genuinely at the same time.

And finally, deepening time invites us to be aware of and honor the legacy we are each leaving during our physical time on Earth. None of us will live forever and each of us graces the world in our own unique ways.

Here “small is large” as the kind word, the helpful touch, the encouragement and courage we offer others spreads out like ripples across a pond. Think of a beloved elder in your life who has passed on. Now let yourself see their face, hear their words, and you will know immediately how their caring and teachings have carried on through you and your life. Our individual legacy of who we are from the core of our being is our gift to the amazing flow of the time and tapestry of life.

We affirm this in each other; we also need to affirm this in ourselves.

Time is a friend if we will look on it as such – if we will allow ourselves to really meet it and to create opportunities to get better acquainted. Our friendship with time will grow as we commit to keeping our hearts open, our integrity strong and our willingness ever present to try new ways of being in relationship. And in so doing we will grow in understanding and appreciation of ourselves and of the flow and depth of time and we will know, deeply, how blessed we are by the moments and hours of each day.

So may it be. So may it be.