Close to forty years ago two psychologists, Daniel Batson and John Darley, conducted a study of seminary students from Princeton Theological Seminary. The purpose of the study was to see how a random group of theology students would do if placed under the precise circumstances of the Good Samaritan story. The study was set up that the students were asked to give a speech over at the adjoining campus of Princeton University. Half of the students were asked to speak about their motives for studying theology and the other half were asked to speak on the parable of the Good Samaritan. That was one variable. The other variable was that half the students were told to begin walking over to the University campus and that they had plenty of time to get there to give their speech, the other half were told to begin walking over to the University campus and that they had no time to spare … in fact, they needed to rush. Along the walking route the study directors had placed an actor who feigned some sort of acute trouble – groaning, coughing, slumped over – clearly a person in distress. And the question was – who would stop to help the groaning, coughing, slumped over man?
The results were conclusive: It did not matter what topic the students were planning to speak on as to whether they would stop and help the hurting man. Even if they were planning to speak on the Good Samaritan – they were no more likely to stop than the others. Instead – the significant factor on whether they would stop for the hurting man had to do with how much time they thought they had to get to their speaking engagement. Those who were in a hurry were far less likely to stop, than those who sensed they had an ample amount of time. When the study was released it came as a shock – especially to the theological students at the seminary. It did not matter if you were a person studying for the ministry, it did not matter if you were prepared to address the topic of The Good Samaritan – what mattered was whether or not you were in a hurry as to whether you would stop to help the hurting man.

A humbling study for us ministry types. A humbling study, I suspect, for us Christian types. Because the truth is, in theory, most of us would like to think that we would be the one who would stop to help the hurting man – but the reality of our lives is that we humans tend to place our time as the judge of what we will do and what we will not do. Time is the great arbiter. I think so much about time that I strap to my wrist this big plastic and metal piece of electronics to know to the second what time it is. Never mind that I have the sun in the sky that tells me generally what time it is. Never mind that there is usually some sort of clock around somewhere that tells me more specifically what time it is. But no, I have to have a digital watch
with seconds – that tells me precisely how much time I have before what I next have to do. And my watch becomes my judge.

Time is of the essence – and one of the great sins of life is to be late.

So we are amazed when we read this story about Jesus. It’s the story of the Good Samaritan – but this time it’s not just a story, it’s an event. And the Samaritan is not a Samaritan – the Samaritan is a Jew. And the Jew is Jesus. And Jesus does not have much time. He is about an important assignment. He is the Son of God – the Word made flesh – and his assignment is to be the instrument of God’s salvation in the world. The whole world. His job is to save the whole world. This is going to take some time. So we wouldn’t be surprised to see Jesus up pretty early in the morning with his calendar open … or his Blackberry buzzing … trying to chart out the day, scheduling this meeting here and that appointment there. Time is of the essence. It’s even worse for him … he’s in the first century with no light bulbs to turn on to extend the day. He’s got more to do than we do … and less time to do it in than we do.

So it is in the midst of his day … that, of course, he does not begin with a calendar or Blackberry, it is in the midst of his day – while he is teaching, surrounded by the crowds – that
the call comes from a man named Jairus that his daughter is sick. “Come Jesus and heal her.”
So what does Jesus say? “Well, OK. Your daughter is sick. But there are lots of children who
are sick. First century Palestine is filled with children who are sick. And I’m teaching here,
can’t you see. It’s a big crowd. They’ve come to hear me. I can get more done here with more
people – than with just your one little girl.” It is certainly one way the story could have gone.
“I don’t have time. I’m thinking economy of scale. I’m trying to save the world.”

We would have understood.

But the story goes a different way. Jesus steps away from the crowd and in a terribly
inefficient use of time … makes his way to Jairus’ house. So that is move number one. This
day is not going the way he thought it would go. He is on his way to Jairus’ house. And
because he is on his way to Jairus’ house he has put himself on a new clock. Because Jairus has
told him that his little daughter is at the point of death. He must come quick. He has no time to
spare. And if we were Jesus’ handlers we would get out or GPS and help him find the fastest
way to get to this little girl. We would break every speed limit. He’s on the clock.
But then … there comes this woman. And this woman has been suffering for a long time. She has some sort of menstrual issue that has rendered her not only weak, but it has rendered her perpetually unclean among her own people. Twelve years she’s been suffering. And she put it in her mind that she does not want to stop Jesus. She imagines that Jesus must be a very busy person. He’s Messiah … he’s saving the world. Don’t stop Jesus. Just try to get close to him to reach out and touch one of the tassels at the end of his robe. If she can just touch one of the tassels at the end of his robe – then maybe there would be power just in that – and she might be healed. So she does just that. She gets close enough. She falls to her knees and she grabs one of those tassels – and wouldn’t you know, but that the healing power of Jesus has come into her … and she is made well. And she did it without stopping Jesus. He doesn’t even have to know that she even exists!

But what does Jesus do? He stops. Jesus, you can’t be stopping. You have this little girl at the verge of death. You’re on the clock. But Jesus stops – because he senses that power has come from him to another – and there must be close at hand a desperate person who has desperately fallen to her knees just to touch his cloak. He has bumped into this sufferer and he must pay attention. So he stops and he acknowledges her and he pays attention to her and he affirms her faith and he completes the healing so that it is not just her body that has been made well, but that it is her soul that has been made well too.
Sometimes … most of the time … you just have to stop.

Now that’s all well and good, but Jesus has just lost time. He’s lost time. Time is a terrible thing to lose. And doesn’t Jairus know that because in the losing of time his little daughter has slipped away. “Trouble the master no more, time is up. Go back to what you were doing, Jesus, we have no more time.” And Jesus says this to those who feel that they have run out of time – to those who think that it is too late now. Jesus says, “Do not fear, but only believe.” “Do not fear that you are out of time … do not fear that you are too late – just believe.” And with that Jesus continues his journey to the home of Jairus and there he finds outside Jairus’ home a crowd of people who know that it is too late. And while Jesus continues on his mission of wellness – they laugh at him because they “know” it’s too late. And aren’t they surprised when the little girl walks from the house. All their fear of being late. It almost kept the Master from entering, from healing, from making her well.

The fear of being late.
It is what kept those seminary students from stopping and helping the hurting man – they feared that they might be late.

Remember the great story that Harry Chapin used to tell in his song *Cats in the Cradle*? It’s a song written, actually, by Harry Chapin’s wife. A song about a father and son. And when the son is born the father has planes to catch and bills to pay and the son learns to walk while he was away. No time to play catch. No time to be a dad. There were things he was afraid of being late for. “And the cats in the cradle and the silver spoon, little boy blue and the man in the moon, when you coming home dad, son I don’t know when – but we’ll get together then. You know we’ll have a good time then.” Chapin himself died at the age of 39 – long before his own children grew.

What are we afraid of being late for?

You remember the story of the little girl walking with her parents along the way and she is stopping and picking white dandelions and blowing the seeds. And the mother takes her arm and pulls her along saying, “Come now Susie, we don’t have time for that.” To which Susie replies: “What is time for, mommy?”
You see, we get this idea about time, don’t we? We get this idea that time is this sequential course of moments … and that time is something we get to manage. And that time is something that needs to work our way and if it doesn’t work our way then that makes us late. The Greeks called this view of time *chronos* – the sequential progression of time. The kind of time you can be late in. But then there was this view of time the Greeks called *kairos* – and kairos was not sequential time – it was opportune time. It was the right time. It was the time at hand. It was God’s time. It’s the kind of time that doesn’t make you late – because you are doing the right thing at the right time. You can never be late when you are doing the right thing at the right time.

I was struck a couple months ago by the story of Paul Goydos – a golfer on the PGA tour who is presently leading the Travelers Championship this weekend up in Connecticut. Goydos has a compelling story to tell about time. When you are a golfer you only have so much time to prove yourself. Usually by the time you get to around 50 you have exhausted your time to be the best you can be. So you have to make the best use of your years. Every year counts, every tournament counts. You can’t waste time. But when Paul Goydos saw his family starting to break apart back in 2004 – and his daughters needing an extra dose of his time – the golfer stopped golfing. He left the tour and played full-time dad for a year. A year in a golfer’s life is
an eternity. But he left the chronos and entered into the kairos. Might this delay his chances of becoming a premier golfer? Might this make him late in his plans to be the best? Of course.

“Do not fear being late,” Jesus says. Take the time at hand. Do the right thing at the right time.

It is, isn’t it, why God breaks our lives into these 24 hours of time we call day and night. It is why he makes the human body such that we must sleep. We must sleep or we will die. It is as if to say that what is at hand is what must be attended to. Focus on today. Today is all you have. “Do not be anxious about tomorrow,” Jesus said. It’s all about today and what the day brings.

What will the day bring? Most of what today will bring is what we did not plan. John Lennon, that great theologian, once said, “Life is what happens when you’re busy making other plans.” And, of course, it’s true. Within the chronos there is kairos. And within each day there are these people … these people who bump into you and who you bump into. And we bump and we bump and we bump. And how little we notice the ones we are bumping into – because we are so busy making other plans. We’re so busy trying not to be late.
But Jesus says, “Believe.” And when he says “believe” he’s saying that we can trust him for the moment. We can trust him to do the right thing at the right time. We can trust him to be late. We can trust him to take care of the Samaritan … of the hurting man on the road and the bleeding woman at our feet.

It was the moment that turned around the life of St. Francis. St. Francis of Assisi. That when he was riding his horse on the Umbrian plain he came upon a leper. Shocked at what he saw and believing that leprosy was highly contagious – Francis galloped on toward his appointed event. But then the voice came – and the voice said stop. Turn around. And so he did. He returned to the leper and got off his horse and walked up to the man and kissed his leprous face. It was the right thing to do at the right time. And with that his life changed – because no more would he ever be late. Time now was kairos, no longer chronos. Life now was lived in days and moments.

Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans. May we, in the kairos, never fear of being late again.