

4. There are three ways in which we “number our days” as God’s children. First, we “number our days” to be reminded of our human frailty. The days, weeks, months and years which fly by continually remind us of our sinful condition. A dying member once told me, “Pastor, I am about to stand trial for 85 years of sin.” It is only God who can remove our despair over all the sins we’ve committed [in time] by promising, “I will forgive their guilt and I will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34)

Second, we “number (the) days” by a new unit of measurement: we count them not by days and weeks and months and years, but by the grace of God. Each day we should look in wonder at “the mercies of the Lord (which) are *new* every morning.” (Lamentations 3:22,23) Unfortunately, many of us have been living in the past or living in the future. We are always talking about either “the good old days,” times when we really had it made, or “someday we’re going to get there.” But we never savor the moments. The only thing we have for sure is today. If we live by learning from the past but not living it in, establishing goals and then pressing forward -- we’ll enjoy each day as a gift from God. That’s why it’s called -- “the present.”

And third, we “number (each) day” because each day is a precious opportunity to honor God, serve others and proclaim Christ. Moses says it rightly; even now God establishes “the work of our hands.” (Ps.90:17) On Judgment Day, you and I will be remembered for our “works” of faith like helping “one of the least” (Matthew 25:40) and “doing -- what is good.” (Romans 2:7)

Friends, you see it in obituaries and funeral bulletins. You probably don’t even notice it, because you really are looking at what comes before and after it. It’s the dash, the mark that connects dates of birth and death. It looks so small, but it stands for all the days that mattered -- the days of that person’s life. Whether our dash is long or short, let’s love our Triune God and care for others. For that’s what it means to have “a heart of wisdom.” (Ps.90:12) Amen.

Psalm 90, “TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS.”

(Last Judgment A) ‘20

In Jesus’ Name, dear friends:

A high school teacher in L. A. has a unique way of stimulating her students to think. From time to time she writes brief messages on the whiteboard that are unrelated to their current studies. One morning, the students found the number 25,550 written on the board. One pupil finally raised his hand and asked the teacher why that particular number was there. She explained that 25,550 represented the number of days in the life of a person who lives to be 70. The teacher was trying to emphasize the swift passage of time and the brevity of human life, facts which are already on our minds due to COVID 19.

1. **Life is short!** In times of trouble and hardship the days may seem to stretch on forever and ever so that we cry out, “O Lord, How long!” (v.13) But -- when we look back upon the days gone by, we still must exclaim, “Life is short!” Despite all avoidance strategies, we are always confronted by the stark reality of this truth: “We finish our years like a sigh...and we fly away.” (vs.9, 10) We are gone and soon forgotten. Many of us can not recite the full names of our own grandparents, the very people who mean so much much to our parents and who in turn mean so much to us. Unless the end of the world comes first, even the tombstones which will supposedly mark our whereabouts forever, will soon be erased by the ravages of the weather. In Psalm 90, Moses who had seen a whole generation -- approximately 1.2 million of his Israelite brothers and sisters die during a 40 years span in the desert, faces the prospect of his own death. He speaks of human life as something quickly swept away by “a flood” (v.5), as a “sleep” which is over even before we’re aware that it’s “morning” (v.5) and as “grass” which is cut down the same day it first sprang up. (v.6) All people return to the “dust” from whence they came. (v.3; Genesis 3:19) In the psalm Moses uses the word “we” to emphasize that not even the people of God are exempted from the swift race toward death. (v.7)

2. As the passage of life is swift, so also **death is inevitable**, no matter what people do to try to masquerade its inevitability. Some of us will try to hide from death through sheer busy-ness. We figure that as long as we are occupied with a multitude of tasks and

hobbies, we won't have the time to even think about death. Others of us will stock up on so many of the world's supplies: food, water, toilet paper that we can thereby pretend that we are never going to leave this world behind. Still others will think that we can push back death indefinitely through special diets and exercise programs. Some try to insulate themselves from death by 'institutionalizing' it, tucking it away behind the walls and doors of hospitals and funeral homes. There will always be those who try to immortalize themselves by writing their memoirs or building a skyscraper with the family name inscribed upon it. And finally, there are the pleasure-seekers whose merrymaking is an attempt to drown out the truth that they'll soon die. In a classic "Calvin and Hobbes" comic strip, Calvin, the precious 6 year-old says to Hobbes, his stuffed tiger, "Live for the moment that is my motto. You never know how long you've got. You could step into the road tomorrow and WHAM, you get hit by a cement truck! Then you'd be sorry you put off your pleasures. That's what I say -- live for the moment." Then he asks Hobbes, "What's your motto?" Hobbes replies, "My motto is: 'Look down the road.'"

Like Hobbes, "Moses, the man of God" "looks down the road" and exposes the whole masquerade about death. Go ahead! Laugh and cry, shout and scream and rationalize as we will, the brick wall of death is still there and stops everyone cold in his/her tracks. The numbers on a digital clock will not slow down for anyone. "The days of our lives add up to 70 or 80 years," but not much more than that. (v.10) Even after a whole life of scurrying about, our long list of awards and accomplishments -- the things that cause us to burst with pride will "disappear quickly." (v.10)

As generation follows upon generation, what is it that makes the human situation so helpless and hopeless? Here Moses remains relentless in his honest appraisal of human life. The problem which always was and now is, belongs not to God but with us. The problem has always been "our guilty deeds" through which "death came to all." (v.8; Romans 5:12) Even "our hidden sins are revealed" by the Lord. (Ps.90:8) We have built up the brick wall of death with our own sinful hands, but our hands are entirely powerless to tear that wall down.

And so it is that Moses simply will not tolerate any false optimism about human life. Like "every day in every way I'm getting better and better." (Emile Coue) He would have us look at our life with such complete honesty that we despair of it -- entirely. "Woe to me!"

(Ps.120:5) As we stare death in the face and all the "trouble and sorrow" that leads up to it, we can do no more than fall flat on our faces. (Ps.90:10) "We are terrified...by (God's) anger." (v.7)

However, Moses wants us to fall flat on our faces not in fear, but in worship of God. He does not leave us comfortless. Already in the first verse of the psalm Moses shows us the direction in which he wants us to fall: "Lord, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations." (v.1)

3. What is **the solution to the human dilemma**? Moses does not base his answer -- his evaluation of life on either a false optimism or on pessimism. He simply draws a contrast between us transitory humans and our eternal God. In other words, what "we" happen to think or feel is not what counts. What really matters is what God thinks and feels and does for us.

With this in mind, Moses speaks for all of us -- when he prays, "O Lord...change Your mind ...satisfy us...with Your mercy." (vs.13,14) It is that "mercy" that makes all the difference in the world. Like "the mountains" He created, His unfailing love was there for us long before we were born and it will be there for us when we die. (v.2) His "mercy" has been shown and given to us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus came into this world knowing what He would find. He experienced the full range of life's problems "yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) In Gethsemane, He stared death in the face and alone on Calvary He slammed into death's brick wall and shattered it. By His death "He has swallowed up death forever" (Isaiah 25:8) and has opened the kingdom of God to all believers. The prayer of Moses, "Satisfy us in the morning with your mercy" (Ps.90:14), was answered on Easter "morning" when Jesus arose on the other side of the wall as our conquering Hero. As a result, "we may sing for joy and be glad all our days." (v.14)

Our own grandchildren may forget our names. The granite stones which mark our resting places may be obliterated or removed. But when we are baptized into the death of our Lord Jesus, we are also baptized into His resurrection. By His grace, we count for something. We are not forgotten; He remembers us as His baptized children. Our life with Christ is described beautifully by Moses: "Teach us to number our days in such a way that we bring a heart of wisdom." (v.12)