

"Make It a Good Day!"

Psalm 118:24

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The young security guard at the Discount Shoe Warehouse in Boston leaned into the door, swung it open, and held it for me. "Make it a good day!" he said cheerfully. I was caught off-guard. All I could do was nod dumbly. Make it a good day? Most people say, "Have a nice day," as if they were handing it to you as a gift, offering it to you as a verbal bon-bon. "Have a nice day." Too late, but thanks for the thought," I sometimes say, or "You the same," or "Back at you."

The familiar parting falls into the category of polite small talk. There's no harm in it, I suppose. Some day, when I'm in one of my more obsessive moods, I'm going to count the number of times someone says, "Have a nice day." Sometimes hearing "Have a nice day" does actually irritate me. One day, when I'm in a New York state of mind (to quote Barry Manilow), I may actually say, "Don't tell me

what kind of day to have!" And the young security guard didn't tell me what kind of a day to have. He told me what to make of the day. "Make it a good day," he said. I did.

Somewhere, in the recesses of my memory, lies a trivia tidbit. In the dim, distant past, perhaps during the late 1940s, Humphrey Bogart starred in a movie titled, "Bad Day at Black Rock. As late as my seminary years, when one of our fellow students blew an exam, we said he was having a bad day at Black Rock. Much later I learned from Judith Viorst what a really bad day might look like. She wrote of "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day."

*I went to sleep with gum in my mouth, and now there's gum in my hair, and when I got out of bed this morning, I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running, and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. I think I'll move to Australia.*

Alexander's day got much worse before it was

finished, and I will tell you all about it, if you will meet me back here next week. Consider this a teaser. You see, this sermon is the first part of a two-part invention on the general theme of thankfulness, a seasonally appropriate offering, but too large to be consumed at one sitting.

Conventional wisdom tells us there are good days and bad days. Biblical wisdom tells us to give thanks continually, in all circumstances, whether it's a good day or a bad day. There is another biblical perspective, though, which maintains there is no such thing as a bad day. That is because God is the author of all our days.

The very first day God created was a good day. We have the poet's imaginative account in Genesis 1. Those of us who make a chaos of creation would do well to ponder the work of a God who brings creation out of chaos. The earth's stage was formless, empty, and dark, but the spirit of God was moving. God, the cosmic stage manager, called for light, and the lights came on. Seeing that the light was good,

God separated it from the darkness, calling the light day and the darkness night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

It is not up to us to pass judgment on what God has created. If God calls creation good, who are we to say any part of it is bad? We may personally be having a rough day, but that doesn't make the day bad. About seven billion inhabitants of planet earth are also having themselves a day. Hey! A day is a day; and you're at least having one, aren't you? So make it a good day.

And if today isn't your favorite, there's always tomorrow. As Little Orphan Annie still reminds us, *Tomorrow, tomorrow, I love ya, tomorrow. You're only a day away!* We are granted the great gifts of eyelids and slumber as a means of shutting the door on one day and preparing for the next—to rest, regenerate, and regroup for a new day. We had some rotten weather earlier in the week—wet, snowy, and cold—with short daylight hours and long nights. Those who

suffer light deprivation depressions are beginning to go through the tortures of the condemned. Add to those who go through seasonal depressions, and you have a big tally of bad days at Black Rock for many of our folks.

What better time for us to assert and affirm our faith, to take a decisional stance toward life? We do so from a biblical base, not an emotional base. We affirm with the psalmist, *This is the day which the Lord hath made. Let us be glad and rejoice in it.* The Revised Standard Version puts it more strongly: *We will be glad in it.* This is the Lord's day, by design and creation. It is our day, only as a gift. It is an insult to the Creator and Giver of today to reject or gainsay the day. This means that how we may be feeling on a particular day is not to be the determiner of how we regard the day. Our job is to make it a good day.

There is more. There's no such thing as a bad day, because God not only created days, he created us. What an astounding miracle! One of the loftiest statements ever made about the miracle that human life exists can be found in

Psalm 139.

*For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works! Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.*

Here the psalmist's language parallels the language of Genesis 1. Where *the earth was without form*, so now before birth the psalmist is *unformed*.

*Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

God numbered our days before we were born! That is the psalmist's claim. No wonder the fatalist says, "When you number's up, it's up! How many days did God write down for you in his book of life? How many? If the average U.S. life expectancy is 78.7 years, in 18months

or so, I'll be living on borrowed time. Life expectancy in the United Kingdom and Canada is longer. Let's emigrate!

78.7 years is 28,725.5 days—which means we'll cork off about noon on that last day. That number does not account for leap year days, which gives us a little breathing room. How many days do you have left? Some of you should already be planted in Salem's cemetery! Nobody owns time but God. God deposits more time in some accounts than others.

Is God unfair in his allocation of life spans? Who are we to say? Even one day is more than we deserve and more than some of us get. On the other hand, the longest life may be filled with misery. Sometimes life is too long. Some of us squander our bank account of days by ruining our health or wasting our days.

I think this is the meaning of the words from Psalm 90: *So teach us to number our days, that we get hearts of wisdom.* Just as God numbers our days, so we are to keep track of them.

Don't let the days slip away unnoticed. Every day is precious, to be savored and enjoyed. Terry Pursley admonishes us in every one of his emails to "Have a good day and enjoy life." That is one of his many gifts to us. He kindly urges us to stop and smell the roses.

God's numbering of our days is God's way of keeping track of us. That's a faith fact. We live under God's watchful eye . . . every day. There's no such thing as a bad day, so make it a good day!

Those who enter the monastic life have a unique way of numbering their days. They tell time by dividing every 24-hour day into eight 3-hour segments. The monks and nuns keep vigil. The day begins at 3:00 a.m. with Lauds. Father Robert Sirocco tells of a young man who entered the novitiate. He wrote home shortly after entering the monastery. *Dear Mom and Dad, Since I came to the monastery, I get up at 3:00 in the morning to pray. Long before the sun comes up or the rest of the world is awake, I am awake and praising God. I am so glad to have found my true vocation.*

His father wrote back: *Dear Son, Your mother and I are gratified that you have found your vocation. We just want you to know that for several years we also rose at 3:00 in the morning. Long before the sun was up or the world was awake, we were awake and praising God for the opportunity to change your diapers. In that, we found our true vocation.*

When our day begins in praise, we have found our true vocation, whether we are on our knees in a monastery chapel or on our feet changing a soiled diaper.

We praise our Maker while we have breath, because we are alive and not dead. As my late stepfather was fond of saying, when asked how he was faring: "Well, at least I'm breathing air and not eating dirt." The great Congregational preacher-poet Isaac Watts said it more nobly.

*I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,  
And when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler powers.  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past  
While life, and thought and being last,*

*Or immortality endures.*

Therefore, we persevere. The treasure of life we carry in fragile earthen vessels, as Paul says, to show that the transcendent power of it belongs to God, not to us. Hear him.

*We do not lose heart . . . We are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but we never have to stand it alone; we may be knocked down, but we are never knocked out!* (II Cor. 4: 1, 8, 9)

There is no such thing as a bad day. That is what Hamilton Jordon says in his memoir, *No Such Thing as a Bad Day*, published in 2000, shortly before his death. Hamilton Jordon is best remembered as chief of staff for President Jimmy Carter. Three times since serving in the Carter administration he had been diagnosed with cancer in various forms: non-Hodgkins lymphoma, lymphoma, melanoma, and prostate cancer. He underwent experimental therapy for his non-Hodgkins lymphoma at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. Here's

what he wrote of that experience.

*I quickly learned that there were two groups of patients. One group kept to themselves, did not talk or socialize, and buried their long faces in a magazine or book when they came to the clinic. These people had cancer, and their resentment and bitterness about their fate was almost palpable. These poor people were alone and had deliberately cut themselves off from family and friends. They expected to die and—more often than not—they did.*

*The other group of patients were the “happy warriors” who had loosely organized themselves . . . into an effective support group. Regardless of their disease or prognosis, these patients would bring cookies for the nurses, tell funny stories to other patients, give hugs to those having a difficult time, and sit and hold the hands of those suffering and dying from cancer. The “happy warriors” were enjoying every minute of life in spite of their cancer, were nurturing to and nurtured by others and were determined to live every day to the fullest . . . It did not take me long to figure out which group I*

*wanted to belong to . . . .*

Years ago in *Tales of Power*, Carlos Castenada wrote:

*The basic difference between an ordinary person and a warrior is that a warrior takes everything as a challenge, while an ordinary person takes everything as a blessing or a curse.*

This day is yours. You, like the ordinary person, may receive it as a curse. In it you can be a prisoner, a victim, a miserably unhappy person. Or, you, like the ordinary person, may receive today as a blessing, something over which you have no control, as if you are powerless to shape it, as if you are the acted upon, rather than the actor. Or, like a happy warrior, you may receive this day as a challenge and an opportunity. Do yourself and the rest of us a favor. Be a happy warrior. Make it a good day!

