Book 20

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1989

"MICROWAVE OR CROCKPOT?"

Psalm 90:1-4
Luke 21:5-9

Sermons sometimes come together in strange ways. For some months now I've been working on a sermon in my mind on the subject of "Time." I've been thinking about how God's time is different from our idea of time. The Psalmist wrote, in thinking about God and our brief time on earth, "For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night."

I've also been fascinated with the contrast between digital watches and those that are more old-fashioned with hands pointing to numbers in a circle. I still prefer those with hands on a face. These two kinds of clocks give us two different concepts of time.

The watch with the hour, minute and second hand, all which move in a circle around the numbers, give us a picture of time related to

space. Furthermore, the circle in which the hands move remind us of the earth's rotation on its own axis and its movement around the sun. That's the way we mark time on our calendars. Time is in a sense circular and the way we keep time is related to movement in space. We even talk about things moving clockwise or counter-clockwise. The clock, with hands, is a modern version of the ancient sun dial.

The digital watch on the other hand, divides up time into bits, bytes or segments, and when we look at a digital watch we do not see the movement of time in the same way. We do not see time as related to space, but are only able to see what hour and minute of the day it is. There are digital watches that can even tell you the exact time down to the one-tenth or one-hundredth second.

Some observors of the human scene have used these two kinds of clocks as metaphors for two different types of personalities. They say, for example, that a digital person is one who is very much concerned with accuracy. What time is it? The digital watch will tell you exactly. Sweeper people, on the other hand, tend to treat things with a broad-brush and tend to be more interested in the over-all picture. It's like the watch with hands pointing to numbers. What time is it? About

ten minutes to seven. Digital people would say, "It's 6:51." There's certainly a place and need for both kinds of time pieces, and both kinds of people in our world.

As I was thinking about these two different ways of understanding time, and wondering how it would all fit together in a sermon, someone gave me an article written by a Native American, Steve Charleston, entitled "THE TYRANNY OF TIME."

He wrote: "The other day I caught myself telling my 10 year-old son that I didn't think we had time to stop at a fast-food place before we hurried on to our next appointment."

Then he went on to say, "As a Native American, and as a Christian, I should have had more sense. But like many people of all colors and cultures in North America, I am often fooled by the quick sleight of hand of Western time. I am fooled into believing that time is real."

"It isn't of course. Time as we know it, is only a human metaphor for a divine movement. It's our invention for describing change and motion. The great cycle of the seasons, the gradual growth of evolving things, the birth and death of stars: This is time. Creational

time. God's time."

Time does have a certain tryanny over us in today's world. Did you ever notice how many words or idioms we have created in our language in relation to time.

We can make time, save time, spend time, waste time, cut time, tell time, borrow time, budget time, invest time, find time, lose time, manage time, have time, squander time, squeeze time, push time, bend time, beg time, limit time, spare time, hurry time, slow time, give time, keep time, watch time, free time, stop time, kill time, and even call time out.

We live in a world which worships speed. We talk about living life in the fast lane. There is instant coffee, instant tea, quick cooking oatmeal, fast food and more. The problem is that we want instant friendship, instant love, instant wealth, instant wisdom and instant faith in God.

Thus, the microwave is an apt symbol or metaphor for much that goes on in our world where we worship speed and living in the fast lane. Robert Frost said, "All metaphors are imperfect and that is the beauty of them." The microwave is an appropriate appliance for a minute-stingy world. It is a symbol of a society that wants immediate results, immediate

rewards, immediate satisfactions. For example, people no longer want to save money to buy things. We want to buy everything now with quick credit and time payments. We want to solve complex social problems instantly so we use a microwave approach. We declare a war on drugs and think that maybe the drug problem can be solved in three to five years.

Lest you misundertand, there is a place in our world for quickness, speed and urgency. For example, if I'm injured, then I want to obtain medical help as soon as possible.

I'm not putting down microwave ovens. We got our first one about three years ago, and it's wonderful for warming up left-overs and it has many other uses as well. But there are some things which cannot be cooked quickly, if we want to obtain their full flavor.

In contrast to the microwave is the crockpot, where things cook slowly and completely. Where the meal is not ready immediately. I was especially reminded of this when a few weeks ago, my wife and I received a very unusual and most delightful surprise gift--an uncooked stew in a large container and the directions said, "Cook slow for 8 to 10 hours in your oven on low heat." We followed the directions and let the mixture slowly cook together for 10 hours. I don't remember ever

tasting a better dish and it was something that could never have gotten that flavor in a microwave.

Microwave or crockpot? There are some things in this life and in the life of the Christian faith that cannot be microwaved. For example, it takes time and lots of time for a deep Christian faith to develop, grow and mature. In fact, our faith in God should never stop growing and maturing. It is never finished. We need to keep it cooking on low heat.

Contrary to much that we hear from certain evangelists, one is not "Born Again" instantly. You do not become a new person altogether in one minute. Yes, you can change the direction of your life, make a turn-around, but the journey to a maturing faith is still a long one. Faith is more like a crockpot, than a microwave. A crockpot faith--that's a faith in which everything simmers together and continues simmering almost forever.

It's like that stew we cooked slowly for 10 hours. If you smelled it or tasted it from minute to minute or even hour to hour, you would not notice much difference. But over a longer period of time, what a difference in taste. In your own following of Jesus, you may not notice much difference from day to day, but if you keep following Him, keep your faith cooking, by being present in worship,

by daily prayer, by being together with and learning from other Christians, then over a period of time what a difference you will notice in your life.

What is true about our faith in God, is also true of human relationships. Deep friendships are not those that are cooked in a microwave, but in a crockpot. They take time to develop and mature.

I believe that being a good parent is similar to crockpot cooking, rather than microwave. It takes time, lots of time for a family to blend together and it's not done with quick short bursts of energy, but rather slow and patient cooking.

The same is true of the marriage relationship. Microwave marriages are not likely to last. And when a human relationship gets into trouble, there are few, if any, microwave cures. In counseling, I frequently meet people who expect almost instant and dramatic changes to take place in their relationships as a result of counseling. However, the healing of broken relationships is more like crockpot than a microwave--slow cooking on low heat.

Furthermore, if we do too much microwave living, we add unneeded stress to our lives.

Remember there are some things that shouldn't be rushed.

A few years ago, I told a story about a dear, 80 year-old woman who nearly lost her life by turning her gardening and yard work into a stressful situation. She took great pride in keeping a perfect yard. That was her full-time job and she drove herself to impossible extremes. One day a neighbor found her under a tree screaming with pain. He called an ambulance and she was brought to the nearest hospital emergency room. She had fallen and broken her hip.

When the doctor asked her how it happened, she said, "I fell from the top of the tree while picking the leaves." "Picking the what?" the doctor asked. "Picking the leaves," she replied. "I like to get them before they fall and make a mess in the yard." She was serious. Her neighbor confirmed it. She had always tried to pick the leaves from the trees before they had a chance to fall.

I wonder how many of us increase the stress or cause stress in our lives when there is no need to. How many of us in other ways try to "Pick the Leaves." We try to rush things too much. We've forgotten how beautiful it is to watch the leaves fall with nature's rhythm. Maybe there's too much microwave living, rather than crockpot living. I saw a sign

which read, "God give me patience. Hurry!"

A crockpot faith in contrast to a microwave faith can give us the taste of one of the really difficult things in our world--the necessity of waiting--wait for the stew to cook, wait for the ingredients to blend together.

Isaiah, the Prophet in the Old Testament, wrote: "Those who believe will not be in haste." That's a revealing truth because it reminds us that underneath our microwave living hides a deficiency of faith. Character is not built alone or in a day. Love is not usually found in a moment and even when it is, it requires the longer stretches of time and experience to build upon it and deepen it. Love is more like crockpot cooking than microwave. In fact, there's a sense in which love is not related to time at all. Love is real because it is timeless, because it exists in the warm, intimate spaces of our lives. Here time stands still. Love is born in a narrowing of distance to the point where self and others lose their meaning.

There's a new "Time Word" in our microwave culture which maybe is a cover-up for the continued destruction of love in our society: It's called "Quality Time." We want to believe that love can be measured by seconds or minutes--that human relationships can be

made warm in the microwave of quick encounters.

We are pretending that we can take care of our children in convenient time, and that we can take care of our human relationships in convenient time and that we can take care of our relationships with God in convenient time. Not so!

Isn't it odd that we Christians have become so addicted to time, whereas Jesus was not much concerned about it. When he was asked the biggest question of all, "When will the end of time be?" he answered, "I do not know." However, he did warn his followers, according to Luke's Gospel, "Take heed that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name saying, 'I am He! and the time is at hand.' Do not go after them."

During this season of the year, especially when so many people seemed so rushed and busy and want to hurry things along, be more like a crockpot than a microwave. We are called to follow Jesus, not rush past him. We are called to come closer, to draw near, for God has narrowed the distance between ourselves and our Creator.

Remember the promise of Isaiah, "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

I am thankful for the microwave, but I believe the crockpot is a better metaphor for deepening our relationship with God and with one another. AMEN.