

Chapel Talk Sunday, July 24 Peter Martin, Crogles Counselor

Readings:

“Life is the stuff that happens while you’re waiting for moments that never come.” – The Wire

“The majority of us complain that life is too short, and that the time granted to us goes by before we’re even aware that it was passing. Yet it is not that we have too little time, but that we waste too much of it. The life we receive is not short, but we make it so; we are not running out of time, we are letting it go. Just as millions might be lost in a flash in the hands of a bad owner, while a few coins in the hands of a good guardian keeps growing and growing, so life is plentiful and long for those who use it properly.” – adapted from Seneca, “On the Shortness of Life”

The topic I’d like to speak about today is time – specifically, making the most of our time both at camp and in our outside lives. It’s not a new subject, but one that I think is important to revisit frequently. Time flies by, and there’s nothing we can do to stop that. But we *can* control how we spend that time, and the decisions we make in that regard shape our lives.

In preparing this chapel I remembered a conversation I had with my grandfather. As we spoke about how I was about to graduate college, he reflected that – despite being 80 years old – he felt like just yesterday *he* was a 22-year-old man graduating like myself. This seemed like a huge exaggeration: in the time since *he* graduated college, my grandfather had joined the army, gotten married, had children and grandchildren; he’d been his town’s chief of police, started his own company and shut it down. Could all that time pass in the blink of an eye? It showed me that we can’t slow the passage of time – we will always look back at the end of our journey with shock at how quickly it has passed.

But as someone who thinks a lot, I spend a good amount of time reflecting on the past. And one good way of measuring how well I’ve spent my time is by how the memories make me feel. Do I feel happiness or regret at how I’ve spent the past week, month or year? A great memory can provide solace in a time of need, while a bad one can make us dwell on our problems or misfortunes. The same can be said about our attitude toward the future: we can look toward moments of great importance with a feeling of dread or excitement at what might happen.

My message for today is that, with the right attitude and approach toward our everyday lives, we can make our time here count – we can look back fondly on the past, and eagerly toward the future. As I said before, it’s not a new message; in fact, it’s as old as the ancient Sanskrit passage we read at the end of every chapel, the reading that starts “Look to this day.” I mean this sentence in particular: “Today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope.” I want to talk today about some ways to make a day “well lived” at Timanous.

Song: Wooded Path

One of the things I love about camp is the structure provided by our daily routine. In waking up at 7:15 or 7:45 every morning, we use almost all of the daylight hours. But one of the dangers of having a set schedule is that we might become complacent – that is, we might become satisfied with the state of affairs and not feel pushed to take risks or experience a variety of different things. Garrett likes to say that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. One of the easiest ways to make the time go by in a flash is to embrace the status quo. When we do that, the days all blend together, the memory becomes a haze with no distinct moments to latch onto.

Moments that break this routine can hold a special significance for our entire lifetimes. I still remember two moments from my first summer at camp 11 years ago that may seem unremarkable, but stick out for me as signposts in my camp memory. The first moment came one evening when a larger boy approached me, a brand-new second-halfer Croggle, and extended his hand, saying “Hi, I’m Ashwall – what’s your name?” All the other older kids were just hanging out with each other and talking about stuff I didn’t understand – I was honored that Ash, a popular older boy, would take the time out of an ordinary free time to try and make a new friend in me.

Another time that summer, a Falcon who I only recognized as the really-loud-and-hyperactive kid came up to me during one free evening and said, “You’re Peter, right? Let’s go play ping pong.” I had only met Tomm Polos once before, so I was surprised he would invite me out of the blue to do something I didn’t know I had any interest in. He led me to the hall, and what would have been a totally forgettable (if enjoyable) evening became something I remember more than a decade later. I probably spent a hundred free evenings as a camper floating around the field, courts or cabin, just talking to people I already knew – but those nights all blur together. Making new friends, doing new things, approaching something familiar a little differently – these are ways to make time count at Timanous.

It might be useful to look at a negative example, a way *not* to make the most of our time. I’m sure all of us have been a position, even at camp, where we wish time would go by faster. Maybe at instructional swim, or during a movie we don’t like. When we wish time along, before we know it all of camp – both the stuff we wished we could fast forward, and the stuff we wished would last forever – feels like it has disappeared. As suggested by the Seneca quote I read earlier, we shouldn’t complain that our time is too short when we willfully urge it along: time not valued is time wasted, and it is foolish to waste the one thing that money or willpower can’t buy you any more of.

Tomm Polos last year spoke to you about fighting apathy, which is the absence of passion or emotion for anything. If you go through camp, or life, too cool to care about anything, you’ll have little to look back on with a smile or a laugh. When I miss camp over the off-seasons, I think about what makes it such a special, valuable and enjoyable a place to be. I realize that at home, there is a tension between what is right, and what others think of as cool or desirable. It might seem cool to tease another boy, to blow off your homework, or

to make jokes about your teachers behind their backs. But at camp, the “right” thing and the “cool” thing are one and the same. No one will second guess you for doing what you think is right at the expense of personal enjoyment. It’s no coincidence that the winner of the Hall of Fame’s Most Popular category so frequently wins Best All Round Camper as well: we have a respect for virtuous qualities here, we *want* to spend time with the kid who treats others in the best way possible.

This idea made me realize why I look back on my time at camp with so many fewer negative memories than my time at home, grade school, or in college: the effort we put forward dictates whether our time is well spent or wasted, and at camp, we try our hardest for ourselves, and to do the right thing for others. The worst memory is not, what if the umpire had given me that call, or what if that school had accepted me? We can’t go through life blaming things *we* can’t control. The *worst* memories come when we look back on something and say, what could have been different if *I* had tried harder: What awards could I have won if I hadn’t just slacked off during every free time? What friends could I have made if I got over the awkwardness of shaking the hand of someone I had never met and telling him a little about myself?

If we fail to take advantage of our time here, then on the last day of camp we’ll realize our mistake, and complain that camp went by too quickly – maybe you didn’t get to know a friend as well as you could have. Maybe you didn’t go out for the baseball team, and you’ll wonder how you would have done if you did. If my grandfather’s 80 years of life could go by in a flash, our three and a half or seven weeks certainly will. But if you live every moment to the fullest, you won’t wonder how much better camp could have been if you had tried your best.

The difference between a great summer, with moments we remember forever, and a summer that causes us to wish we had done more, or done better, depends on your own actions: Only you can choose to put your best foot forward and reject complacency by living for the present. A hockey player named Guy Lafleur once said, “Play every game like it’s your last.” Live these next three weeks like they are the last you will spend at camp: don’t leave anything for next time. This summer only happens once, and you never know for sure if you’ll be back here with this collection of friends again. **Make this time count.** You might still cry your eyes out after Banquet – I know I have – but at least make sure you can do it for the right reasons: not because you wish you had spent your time better, but because you participated in making a beautiful memory for yourself and your friends here. No matter how long or far you go away from camp, that memory will stay with you.

Song: You’ve Got a Friend