

First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA

November 5, 2025

PASTORAL REFLECTION Reverend Thomas Hawkins



WE ARE CREATURES OF TIME

In his book, *How to Inhabit Time: Understanding the Past, Facing the Future, Living Faithfully Now*, James K. A. Smith describes how one summer he and his spouse were vacationing on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, which is on the very edge of the eastern time zone. Curiously, their phones and smartwatches would unpredictably flip back and forth between central and eastern time. They concluded that presumably their digital devices were picking up interference from cell signals coming from the western side of Lake Michigan, which were in the central time zone. Without their old-school wristwatches as back-up, they found it impossible to know what time it “really” was.

We haven’t always used “clock” time to know what time it really is. Throughout most of human history time was not calculated in minutes and hours. Nor was it chopped into distinct time zones. Time was indexed by the sun and stars, the cycles of day and night, and the rhythm of changing seasons. The problem with “natural” time is that it’s not fixed into computational units. Each day is elastic. The sun rises and sets at a different time every day as the earth circles the sun. And its rising and setting varies ever so slightly depending on your geographic location.

Business and industry thus cannot rely on “natural time”. When each community sets its own clocks based on when the sun rises and sets where they are, then no community has the same time schedule as another. Imagine trying to manage a railroad timetable between East Longmeadow and Cleveland, Ohio, when arrivals and departures are not synchronized to a common “time zone.” After numerous train wrecks and constant misaligned product deliveries, business and industry pressured the US Congress to convene the International Meridian Conference in 1884 to agree on a global time system. Hence our current time zones that we sometimes tweak and always complain about.

Our dogs clearly operate by “natural” time, not “clock” time. Hence, they have been disoriented and confused this week. They wake up at the wrong time. They are upset because we are not filling their bowls with kibble at the expected time. We humans also experience a similar disorientation when we “fall back” or “spring forward.” Auto accidents go up when the time changes in the fall. They decrease when our clocks change in the spring. Health statistics show an increase in heart attacks when we “fall back”. Stanford Medicine suggests that our semi-annual time changes may contribute to increased rates of stroke and obesity.

The Bible and our hymnody are generously sprinkled with references to time. Their concerns lie deeper than those of whether we are “falling back” and “springing forward.” Genesis begins with the story of God setting time itself in motion. In Psalm 90 we are instructed “to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (vs 12). Ecclesiastes 3 describes how there “is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven” (vs. 1). We sang a hymn last Sunday on the weekend our clocks “fall back” that described time as a surging stream that bears all its children along in its wake.

These themes are not those of “time management.” Nor do they counsel us to seek out consultants and coaches to help us our budget time more efficiently. They instead remind us that we are creatures of days and times gifted to us by a God who both dwells beyond time but is present within time. Our lives are held firm by God who is continually redeeming the broken fragments of our imperfect past lives and reconfiguring them into graced futures that are yet to unfold. As another time-themed song in our hymnal says,

*In our end is our beginning;
In our time, infinity.
In our doubt, there is believing;
In our life, eternity.*

*From the past will come the future;
What it holds, a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season,
Something God alone can see.*

Blessings, Pastor Thomas

SUNDAY WORSHIP in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

ADVENT STUDY “Minor Players in a Big Story”

Join Pastor Thomas for this year’s Advent Study, “Minor Players in a Big Story.” We’ll be using familiar carols or hymns and scripture to look at some minor characters in the Christmas story: Elizabeth and Zechariah, the shepherds in the hills around Bethlehem, and King Herod.

December 7 – “Struck Speechless” (Zechariah and Elizabeth)

Scripture – Luke 1:5-23, 57-80

hymn – “Blessed Be The God of Israel”

December 14 – “Playing the Victim Villain”

Scripture – Matthew 2:1-18

Carol – “Coventry Carol” (Lullay, Lullah)

December 21 – “A Glimpse of Heaven”

Scripture – Luke 2:8-20

Carol – “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks”

Each session will begin shortly after Coffee Hour at 11:15 and conclude at 12:30 p.m.

Please sign up on the poster in fellowship hall so we have an idea of the size space we need for seating!

THANKSGIVING FOOD COLLECTION

Once again we are going to have a Thanksgiving food collection. On Sunday November 9, we will be passing out a grocery bag to each of you to collect some non-perishable food items that we will use to serve the families in need at Kensington school. Some examples of items you could put in your bag are: rice, pasta, pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly/jam, soups, crackers, cookies, cereal, tuna or canned chicken, canned vegetables or fruit, snack cups of fruit/applesauce, etc.

Please bring the bags back to church by **Sunday November 23** and place them on the altar. The staff at Kensington and the families we serve are so appreciative of our help. We all have much to be thankful for at this time of the year. One of the things I am thankful for is this caring and supportive church family. Seems like I am always coming to you with a request for something and you never disappoint me. Thank you so much for your continued support and for sharing God’s love with our Kensington families.

ALTAR FLOWERS

The flower committee invites you to sign up for altar flowers. November 16, 23 are open dates. Call the church office if you are interested.



PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

God of time and seasons: We thank you for the changing beauty of this season. For the crispness of a fall morning and the beauty of autumn leaves. We your children dwell within the incessant flow of time, Grant that, by your Holy Spirit, we might treasure each season of our lives as a gift from you and perceive you at work within us at all times and in all places. For you are always gathering up the broken fragments of our past failings or wounds and assembling them into new patterns of wholeness and hope. Amen.



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