



**May 12, 2025**

## **Timely Faith Matters**

Our Bordoodle, Stanley, seems to have an uncanny sense of time. He wakes me up when it's time for his breakfast, and he stares at me relentlessly at 5:00 until I serve his dinner. He learns from experience: He knows that getting his vest on is the immediate precursor to his mid-afternoon walk. When we're away from home, he knows to watch for us from his chair by the window when we're due to return. By 11:00 p.m., he does his best to herd all two of us upstairs for bed.

Of course, Stanley might simply respond to his own hunger or biological clock, or he might perceive the different qualities of light throughout the day. He might wait for us more or less incessantly, whenever we're gone. According to an NPR "Finding Time" series, though, his excellent sense of smell might contribute to his ability to judge time, and our human, individual scents must fade a bit when we're away from him. (Further, when we return, he can smell whether he should be justifiably outraged because we have spent time with another animal.)

I like to think that my own *abstract* sense of time is superior to Stan's, and I have the language with which to discuss time. I can remember (some) past events, describe them, and learn from them. I am among the least likely humans to oversleep, even without Stan, and I am extremely unlikely to become so engrossed in what I'm doing that I "lose track of time" and miss an appointment. (I know, that's kind of sad.) I love the morning and the changing seasons in Michigan, but if I want to know why four Michigan counties are on Central Standard Time, how many light-years away we are from the nearest star beyond our sun, and how Greenwich and gravity are pertinent to anything about time, I must do a little research. I can be told that time is relative or illusory, but I don't thoroughly understand.

What human *does* truly understand time? We can learn that the earth is more than four billion years old, or that God created all in six days (or God-days), but conceiving of either or both requires some imagination. Neither can we easily imagine what *eternal life* or *eternity* would be like. We find it unthinkable that our civilization would decline and perish, and yet we know that many great civilizations in the past have done so.

Percy Bysshe Shelley's sonnet, "Ozymandias" (1818), comes to mind:

*I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said —"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."*

The sculptor understood Ozymandias's assumption that his power would dazzle forever, and indeed, the passions of such people do "yet survive," because such mistaken assumptions about lasting power are typical and perennial among human beings. Nothing else beyond human arrogance remains of Ozymandias, except for a decimated statue and endless sands. Unless we know Shelley's poem, which perhaps immortalizes him, we are unlikely to have ever heard of the Egyptian pharaoh.

But we have another King in mind, and even if our lives are not even a moment in time, we are assured that our faith matters, that we benefit from the "extravagant" love of God, and that all we need do is believe that in "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4, NRSV), God sent Christ to suffer for our sins. We are promised a second coming, and as Rev. Anne says, "Friends, he will surely come again." That might not be as soon as Christians two thousand years ago believed, but a loving and just God will determine when the "the fullness of time" has come again. Meanwhile, Jesus promises, "And remember, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20, NRSV).

~Written by Maurine Slaughter

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