

A man named Randy Hoffman, ordained as a minister back in 1985, now earns his living as an artist sculpting religious themes using sand and sea water as his medium. In the past three decades he has created monumental works such as, “Christ on the Cross,” “The last Supper,” “Jesus Praying” and “David and Goliath.” If you ever find yourself near Ocean City, Maryland, strolling down the boardwalk around the Plim Plaza Hotel on the beach at second Street, most likely you will see some of his work. But, if you don’t want can cash in your airline miles, or use up some of your vacation time, you can also check out his work on his website [Randy Hofman.com](http://RandyHofman.com).

As an artist and reverend, Randy uses his God-given talents for God’s good use. In fact, he actually views his sand sculptures as a form of ministry. The intricate work he performs, with normal beach sand and ocean water, to create famous Biblical scenes from scripture, has a tendency to attract people’s attention. I don’t know about you, but whenever I have had the chance to enjoy a gorgeous beach, I often find myself intrigued by the things people are able to make out of sand, especially given the fact that Sand Sculpting, which apparently is growing in national popularity, is a purposely temporary and fragile art form. Here today, gone tomorrow, taken by the tide, or the rain, or the wind. The impermanence of sand is part of the magic, part of the beauty.

Most of us, however, devalue the temporary, the fleeting, the short-term. If something doesn’t last, or if doesn’t have staying power, it usually doesn’t have much value to us. After all, we want durability, sustainability, strength and endurance — whether we’re talking about our marriages, our washing machines, our refrigerators, our jobs, our cars, our families, or our God. We desire things that last. We cling to the permanent, perhaps because, deep down, we know that life is a sand castle before a coming tide.

Nothing wrong with that kind of thinking! But this morning the apostle Paul, in our Second lesson from Ephesians, urges us to: “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.” He knew that we have so few opportunities to create something beautiful, and that every decisive or opportune moment counts. A famous hymn writer named Lowell Mason put it this way: “Work, for the night is coming.”

Today Paul says something similar when he declares, “Make the most of the chances you get to do something right, because evil always threatens to get in your way.” As a Minister and sand sculptor Hoffman says, “Make something beautiful now, because the tide will wash it away later.” This then begs the question, “Why?” It’s a question that’s often asked of Buddhist monks who create famed colored sand mandalas only to obliterate them within hours or days.

And the first response to that question might be “Why not?” The choice for the sand is that it can remain merely sand, stretching endlessly along the shore, flat, formless and undistinguishable, or it can yield to the hand of an Artist who can fashion it into something beautiful while there is an opportunity to do so. If I’m sand, I want to say to God, “Make me your work of art!” Life is so short.... why not ask God to make you his art, his masterpiece?

A British Poet and songwriter Anne Ross Cousin wrote, “The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of heaven breaks,/ The summer morn I’ve sighed for, the fair, sweet morn awakes:/ Dark, dark hath been the midnight, but dayspring is at hand,/ And glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel’s land.”

Paul, whose sense of Kairos time, meaning perfect or opportune timing, was layered with eschatological urgency, and he understood that his life was but a stretch of sand in which, and upon which, the Creator was at work. Therefore, he urges us to adopt the same attitude toward our daily business: • Be careful • Make the most of the time you have, because the days are evil. •Don’t be foolish • Do

understand the will of God. • Don't get drunk . • Be filled with the Holy Spirit . • Sing songs • Give thanks.

The second response to our why question, is that by investing in the Kairos moment, we practice the presence of God. In other words we practice sacramentalizing the mundane and we transform the commonplace into a divine spirit of grace. In fact, being in the presence of God, in the midst of a creative process, is rather common to faith-filled artists. The French post-Impressionist painter, Paul Cézanne, is known to have painted Mont Sainte-Victoire more than 60 times. Repetition is a discipline that is more like a chant with a brush, over and over. It is said that for Cézanne, repetitive painting was a meditative, prayerful experience, where he found himself lost in the presence of God. For Cézanne, and countless other artists of every sort, the process is a chance for prayer. It is a chance for us to experience the divineness of God; a chance to use our time wisely.

What happens is.....The artist finds in the process, in the prayer, that God is present in the moment, in the now. That is the beauty of creativity. It is a chance to pray. It is a chance to feel God's presence, because God is a living verb who speaks only in the language of the present moment. Imagine praying while you work. Imagine your work becoming prayer.

How we "make the most of time" is thus a function of how well we use our *chronos* (*our normal everyday time*) to focus on the *kairos*, or the right, critical, or opportune moment, the fullness of God's time. How does your calendar reflect time spent cultivating your relationship with God via the Holy Spirit? Does your daily rhythm include time dedicated solely to prayer, "giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ"? Do you search the Scriptures daily to "understand what the will of the Lord is" for your life? Are you participating in weekly worship where you can be filled with the Spirit and make "melody to the Lord" in your heart?

Finally, sand art edifies those who see it. It is the very ordinariness of sand, its sameness, its blandness, its mundaneness, that makes the works of art created out of it so refreshing. That's why when human beings open themselves to the work of the will of God in their lives, living carefully, understanding the will of God, being filled with the Holy Spirit, singing and giving thanks in all circumstances — that's why the world regards it as such breathtaking art!

To put it another way..... Anyone can be sand! Not everyone can be a castle in the sand! That's why, like Randy Hofman, we must make the most of our time, creating sculptures to spiritually edify any viewer. He prays in the making, while he is sculpting, and viewers are awed in the viewing. He builds his works of art from a child's materials — beach sand and salt water. Those materials, the sand itself, and the water, too, which so quickly return to the earth, represent and symbolize the fleeting fragility of life, our own impermanence.

Part of prayer, part of praising, part of being in the Spirit is to enter the only permanence there is in all creation — heaven within us. Part of the beauty, the risk, and the tragedy is knowing that sand sculptures are frail and will fall. Part of our risk, our own beauty, and our own tragedy is knowing the same about ourselves. Part of the beauty is seeking God and finding peace in the permanence of his presence. Whether we recognize it or not, we are made of sand and water — of “dust” as Genesis tells us. Our days are numbered. Our time here has inherent restrictions. The tide is rising. The wind is blowing.

We need to use our time wisely, not foolishly. We need to use our talents, our calling, to enter the kingdom of God now, to give of ourselves to others in the process and to pray all the while. If we do, we will find God's beauty inside us, around us, beyond us. After all, God's beauty is the only permanence there is. Randy Hoffman constructs sand structures knowing they will collapse. But his ministry and work is not only great for the sand, and for the Artist, it is also

incredible for those who are provided with the opportunity to see it. So let's allow God to sculpt and mold us so others will see his love, his grace, his light in our lives and glorify him as well. Amen