But, just what does that mean? The “meantime” is time between *now*and*then*. Let me give you an example: You arrive at the airport early. You check in, pay all the extra fees, clear security and are now putting on your shoes. This is the “now” part. But your flight does not leave for another 90 minutes. That is the “then” part. So, between the *now* and the *then*, you decide to get a bite to eat at a little café and check your email. Perhaps you have a little work to do. You might read a book or a magazine. You are living in the meantime.

So was Paul. His “flight” was not scheduled to leave quite yet, and he did not know when he would be pushing back from the gate. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul says he is packed and ready, but he suspects a delay: “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.” (Philippians 1:21-26). Paul feels “pressed between the two.” He was living in the *now* but looking forward to the *then*. For him, it was a choice between hard times in this life or eternal life after death.

Paul knew about hard times in this life; at times he was beaten, tortured, imprisoned, and shipwrecked. Living in the meantime for Paul meant living in some mean times. But he did not regard his gap life to be an empty life. Quite the contrary: Paul considered this gap-time as an extended opportunity to share the gospel. Paul had a plan and a mission to fulfill in this meantime. While awaiting his death or the return of Jesus, Paul had work to do. And there were people who needed him to fulfill his mission.

Paul sees himself as an ambassador for God (v. 20) and his message is reconciliation. Paul urges us to be reconciled to God. He wants us to know that God no longer has an issue with us. We are reconciled to God, through Jesus Christ, Paul says, “that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting [our] trespasses against [us]” (v. 19). Paul’s mission is to let people know: “Hey, God has no beef with you! Why not be reconciled? Reach out. God is ready to receive you as one of God’s own children.” Paul encourages people to turn their faces to God and embrace a fresh start. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (v. 17).

Each of us lives in this meantime between what is *now* and what will be *then*; but that does not mean we have to be idle while we await the glory of God’s promised Kingdom. God’s plan, God’s will, God’s purpose for us is not aimlessness, confusion, inactivity, or despair. There is a secret to successful living when we are caught between parentheses, in no man’s land, in a spiritual demilitarized zone! Paul mentions it in our reading for today. It is buried in the early verses of the passage; it is easy to miss, but it is there.

**The Gap Life Secret.** Living successfully in the meantime was a major theme for Paul. In our text, he reveals the mystery in verses 6 and 7: “So we are always confident.” And why are we confident? “[Because] we walk by faith, not by sight.” For Paul, *it is always about faith.* Faith in God’s great love for us as demonstrated in Jesus Christ. Faith in the God who keeps God’s promises. Faith that God is with us, even in the meantime, while we wait. Faith that when we identify our core values and live by them, our purpose and mission with reveal itself.

For an illustration of this, I turn from faith to football, and football’s greatest coach, Vince Lombardi. In his biography of Lombardi, David Maraniss pinpoints the moment the Green Bay Packers began to march to greatness. It was the summer of 1961. The Packers had lost the 1960 championship game against the Philadelphia Eagles when they squandered a fourth-quarter lead.

Lombardi opened football camp. He knew the players were brooding about that loss. They wanted to sharpen their skills. They wanted to take their game to the next level. They were living in the meantime, that time between their humiliating defeat and the moment, still in the future, when they would hoist the trophy. They were so close, they felt it. To a man, everyone believed this. Except Lombardi.

When the players came into camp that summer, he regarded each of them as a clean slate. He intended to start over with these athletes. Maraniss writes: “[Lombardi] took nothing for granted. He began a tradition of starting from scratch, assuming that the players were blank slates who carried over no knowledge from the year before…He began with the most elemental statement of all. ‘Gentlemen,’ he said, holding a pigskin in his right hand, ‘this is a football.’”

Lombardi took the team back to the fundamentals. He taught them how to block and tackle. And under Lombardi’s tutelage, they never lost another playoff game. They beat the New York Giants 37-0 that year, and they won five championships in seven years, and three in a row during one stretch. Lombardi never coached a team with a losing record. “Fundamentals first,” said coach Lombardi.

“Faith first,” says the apostle Paul because faith is the fundamental secret or key. Paul holds up faith like Lombardi held a football: “Friends in Christ, this is faith. Walk by it. Hold on to it. Don’t drop it or let it slip from your grasp. Cling tightly to it. Defend it from all attacks. Believe in it. Carry it, and it will carry you to victory!”

Most high school students who take a gap year do so voluntarily. But life doesn’t always work that way, does it? Sometimes, we have no choice. A gap life is thrust upon us. Something happens, and suddenly we are living between two points: what was, and what we hope will be. Meanwhile, we need to figure things out. Paul walked by faith, and so can we. Paul was an ambassador for Jesus Christ, and his mission was to reconcile people to God. The fundamental truth to which we cling is that God has a purpose for us, and God is working out that purpose right now, one day at a time.

Prayer: Dear God, we pray that you would remind us that that we are all a part of building and expanding your Kingdom. We ask that you give us a fresh vision for your purpose for our lives. We ask that you open our eyes, our ears, our hearts, and our minds to your vision so that we can live out our purpose. Remove anything from our lives that hinders us from discerning your vision. We pray that you would draw us closer to you as you bring us revelation to our purpose. Please reveal to us what we need to do today to not run wild, but rather be focused on your divine vision. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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**Living in the Meantime**

Sunday, June 13, 2021 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-21

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

What do Prince Harry, Elon Musk, T.S Eliot, Ashley Judd, Matthew McConaughey, Emma Watson, and Hugh Jackman have in common? They all took a gap year, an interim period after high school and before the first year of college. It is now mid-June. High school seniors got their diplomas within the past three weeks, and many of them are now on “gap.” Many students use the year to travel, experience personal growth and prepare for their future.

Students, like Annabelle who called her life a “train wreck.” Under pressure from family, friends, and teachers to slide right into university life, Annabelle felt she needed some time to “become the best version of herself.” Annabelle took a gap year. Writing on medium.com, Annabelle shared how she spent time during her “gap” as a runway model, taking singing lessons, play in her Alumni and town’s band, producing a musical at her high school, and acting in a play. In what little time she had left, Annabelle painted and did makeup artistry. If that weren’t enough, Annabelle went from being a cashier to head of the entire cosmetics section at her local Target. Following her gap year, Annabelle enrolled in the theater program at a nearby university, and today works as a “staff carpenter” building sets.

In a sense, gap year kids are living in the meantime. They are living between the past and their future. They are in a twilight zone that they know will not last forever; which is fortunate because, like the twilight zone, some weird stuff often happens. Sometimes, the weird stuff is what others simply call “growing up.” This gap-year thinking is critical for our discussion of today’s reading from 2 Corinthians.

**A Gap Life.** The apostle Paul had an interesting take on life. For him, his life was a “gap life.” That is, it was life in parentheses, life in the anteroom room of the kingdom of heaven. It was life *before* life. He was living “in the meantime.” Paul writes, “While we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord…we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please [God]” (vv. 6, 8-9). Paul is making the most of his gap-life, of living in the meantime.