

Sermon 01 21 2018 The Rev. Alexander McCurdy III

“For the present form of this world is passing away.” I Cor. 7:31

As the saying goes: “You don’t have to be a rocket scientist” to be able to agree with Paul’s words here in his letter to the Corinthians. The present form of this world is definitely passing away—it just depends where you look and how you evaluate things, that determines the speed of it.

And speaking of rocket scientists, we had one speak at our men’s breakfast recently. Quite a guy: professor of astrophysics, formerly with NASA, the whole 9 yards, or rather the whole 9 gazillion light years.

He talked about many aspects of God’s creation our machines and mathematics are beginning to see. But one thing I took away were his descriptions of the ultra-extraordinary confluence of things that has permitted life on this planet to exist and thrive. It’s so fragile, such a fragile miracle when we look at all we can see in space. There’s nothing even slightly similar to it. Astronomers are excited even if they find even a suggestion of water anywhere out there.

And of course the other utter miracle of our existence on this planet is that it’s all happened and happening in a split second of time when we put our human existence up against the whole reality of space and time. An extraordinary creation, not to mention the fact that we humans have minds—we can think and reflect and choose. All an accident of nature? Hardly. Real Rocket scientist don’t believe that for a minute.

The earth’s position relative to the sun is amazingly and precisely right for life. Any nearer we’d burn. Any farther away and we’d freeze. The angle of our planet relative to the sun is precisely right for life. If that angle of tilt were but the slightest bit different: burn up or frozen.

And astrophysically speaking: time’s running out—the sun will cool, the earth is scheduled to freeze and die, unless we humans speed up the arrival of the end with our weapons of mass destruction.

And here’s Old St Paul saying to us a few seconds ago:

“For the present form of this world is passing away.” Well, it certainly is, in a very personal way for me as I look down on these old bones of mine.

So with that all in mind: what are we to do? Heads in the sand? Eat, drink and be merry? Get depressed? Plan on moving to Mars? Good luck!

No, today’s readings from scriptures tell us exactly what to do—three voices: Jonah, Paul & Jesus.

Jonah says to the citizens of Nineveh and to us: shape up fast, behave.” Paul says to the Corinthians and to us : “the appointed time has grown short ... live ‘as if’ everything you’re attached to in this life no longer existed.”

And of course Jesus to four fisherman and to everyone of us here: “Drop what you’re doing, drop it now and follow me ... now.”

But what in earth does that translate into right *now* for us?

Begin with Jonah, who knew a thing or two after his encounter with the fish:

We have to modify our Nineveh attitudes:

Where was I unkind today? Where did I not stand up for justice and truth against dishonesty, evil and trickery?

Where am I badly selfish? Such questions. Repent. Change our ways. That’s what Jonah tells us.

Second: following Paul: to live in an “as if way”. What might that mean? Devoted though we are and must remain to our God-given lives, wives, husbands, kids, friends and gifts of life, *at the same time*, we are called to live “as if” we had none of these attachments. We’re called to play a double game.

We all do two things at a time, sometimes more: we drive and we text. We listen to someone speaking to us, but we think about something else. We cook and we watch a ball game. We laugh and we cry.

So it is with living our God-given lives here and at the same time living “as if” God is all we had. We’re called to say over and over: “Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come to this earth.” We’ve all got two eyes. One of them has to be focused on the gifts and challenges of this world, the other eye on the enormous fact that GOD IS; that GOD IS FOR US HUMANS--- all of us---no exceptions.

That’s living “as if” all the things and people we are attached to did not exist—as indeed they won’t in time, long or short. What **remains** is and always will be **you in God’s arms**.

But in life even if and when we’re feeling miserable for some reason, Paul tells us, Jonah tells us and Jesus tells us: keep straining our ears, listen for Jesus’s call. Follow him however we can. Being here on Sunday. When things are bad or difficult, pray even though we don’t know how to. Blunder out anything, just speak.

Fret as we must sometimes, but we just have to keep at it.

Paul reminds us in Romans that the Spirit will help us even though we don’t pray well. “God help. God where are you? Come Holy Spirit now, please, I’m lost.” That’s prayer. That answering Jesus’s call. That’s being without everything except with God.

Frank wrote a great email blast to the Parish this week---- writing about the difference between happiness and joy; of how we humans inevitably seek happiness in life. But the joy we Christians have, he reminds us, is something else. It is a quiet, warm inner sensation and knowledge of being ever so firmly in God's arms. We Christians can maintain essential joy even when everything is bad, even when life itself darkens and ends. That joy, we hold.

Now-a-days, we have come to refer to someone's funeral service as a "celebration of the life" of the dead person. I understand that, being appreciative for a loved one's gifts to others, nothing wrong with that.

And we have a file of planned funeral services in our office, drawn up by parishioners who have selected hymns and readings, a place for remembrances and other wishes they have. It's actually a very helpful and sensitive gesture which later on the family can see and adjust in any way they wish.

But I planned one with one of our parishioners a few years back which was a bit different. She picked out readings, hymns, Rite I over Rite two, with communion, but then said in so many words: "I don't want this to be a celebration of my life. I want a celebration first and foremost of God's gift to me. I want the Gospel preached, not folks getting up and saying any good things about me, when that is so utterly insignificant at best, exaggerated and untrue at least."

She went on to say in essence: "At most, the preacher might say that this old lady had the flame of joy of Almighty God protected in her heart. Say, that flame kept burning even as everything collapsed and went badly around her in her life and finally in her body.

Say the old gal smiled, at the last."

Regardless of how you or I would plan such a service, the focus on the Joy of hearing Christ's call might help us all, as we tend to that inextinguishable flame of Joy in our own hearts.