

St. PAUL'S CHURCH
3 PENTECOST - YEAR B (RCL-Track One)

Wellsboro, PA
8-9 June 2024

1 Samuel 8: 4-11, 16-20
Gradual Psalm 138
2 Corinthians 4:13 - 5:1
Mark 3: 20-35

PERMANENT DWELLING

This life is temporary,
as St. Paul writes, "our outer nature is wasting away."
And yet in Christian faith there is more,
an inner nature, which we understand as the soul - or the Spirit -
which with faith in Christ is renewed and strengthened "day by day."
"We know that the one who raised Jesus will raise us also with Jesus."

Years ago, in a parish far far away, we lost a saint.
Our Junior Warden died while on a long-anticipated trip to Alaska
with his beloved wife.
Long-anticipated is a gross understatement.
As they prepared to leave on Sunday,
Dianne had to drag Lee from Coffee Hour so they could pack,
as he was talking and talking and talking about this trip
they had planned to celebrate their 50th.
In the joy of life, Lee stepped into a fishing boat in Alaska on Thursday,
caught the first fish, and then suffered a devastating stroke.
A message to us on several levels:
we never know when God will take us;
love every moment of every day,
and be sure to kiss your loved one Good-bye,
even if you're just going fishing -
and she's going to spend the day going from shop to shop.

Yet this is not a eulogy for one man,
but an invitation for us to dig deeply into the truth of the Gospel
and to discuss important issues of Christian faith
at a time when most of us are healthy, though some are suffering,
and all of us have, as St. Paul so aptly describes,
an outer nature that, despite our efforts, continues to waste away.

There is a comical article in an issue of Smithsonian magazine by explorer Tim Cahill entitled "Perfect Pitch."

The Baka people of the Ndoki forest thought my "home" was "flimsy." At least that's the way the words were translated to me as the Baka milled about my tent and pinched the material, intent as fabric buyers in the garment district. My "home" wouldn't be much protection against, say, a leopard. Forest elephants would walk right over it, and anything inside. Like me.... I had chosen to bring along a shelter that the Baka thought no more substantial than a spider's web.

Well, I would try to pitch my flimsy home off animal trails but close enough to the others so that they could hear me scream. I'd sleep with one ear open.

Smithsonian, June 2012, p.16

Anyone who has ever taken kids or grandkids camping will quickly identify. At Goosepond Scout Camp where I will be back there again in a few weeks, we have old canvas Army tents with open flaps - and lots of Daddy-Long-Legs.

I close every Vesper service with an old Scottish prayer, designed, I think, for every first year camper:

"From Ghoulies and Ghosties and Long-Leggetie Beasties and Things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, Deliver us!"

Of course, it gets a giggle or two, but that's because there's an element of truth - a larger element.

St. Paul makes a perfect analogy between this earthly tent which is flimsy and the heavenly dwelling which is solid and everlasting.

The older we get, the more we face the reality that this outer nature is going to fade away.

And as we get even older, we realize that it is fading away.

Life is, after all, a terminal disease.

But it's not the end.

So cliché

so cut-and-paste

so, well, seemingly hollow promises.

I've heard this before, every Easter.

Every funeral sermon.
Every time I come to Church.
But does it help when I'm standing in the ER
watching life ebb away from a loved one?

Chaplains and ministers often encourage people
to start thinking about death early -
such things as making Advance Directives and Living Wills,
estate planning, even if you don't think you have any estate -
don't leave it to the state! -

writing your own obituary and planning your funeral.
Don't leave it up to your family in a time of crisis to make these decisions!
Chaplain Rob Ruff suggests that you also use your prayer life
in order to prepare for death.

The most important thing, he says according to *Christian Century* magazine,
is "to say the most important words to the most important people
in your life: Forgive me; I forgive you; Thank you; I love you."

The Christian Century, June 13, 2012

Words that somehow seem to reflect the Lord's Prayer -
that basic building block of our faith, the Lord's Prayer.

Retired Anglican Bishop and famed New Testament author, N. T. Wright
believes that what we do in this life is building for the kingdom.

Bishop Wright suggests that the Lord's Prayer gives us pure insight
into this life, as well as insight into the kingdom of God.

In his book, *How God became King*, Wright offers that the phrase,
"your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" suggests that,
"while heaven is indisputably God's realm, it's not some distantly
remote galaxy hopelessly removed from human reality.

The two dimensions intersect and overlap so that the divine
bleeds over into this world.

The Christian Century, June 13, 2012

I love that concept -

Quantum physics interfacing with theology -
producing pure spirituality!

Yet this is not just conceptual jargon.

It bears itself out in people's experience of death.

When Eleanor was at the moment of death,

she said to her deceased son-in-law, "I'm coming, Zach."

When Lee lay in the ER, Dianne called for her mother
who died a year or so earlier, to come and welcome him.
Another person in the ICU told me that years ago
this man was in an accident.
“You know that bright light thing they tell you about? I saw it.
I even heard voices telling me it was OK, to just come over.”
Not the patient, but the ICU attendant!
He saw a light beaming from somewhere within the room -
he couldn't explain how or where.
Now this is a man who professed to not be a faithful Church-goer.
But he may be more faithful that he believes.

Then there was the “deceased” patient.
He responded to those voices, whoever they were, around him,
“I'm not going. I'm not ready.”
“It was the weirdest thing,” he told me, “I kind of jerked,
and woke up in the ER.”
We often say when someone dies,
“It's OK, they're still here, right here in our hearts.”
Well, that may be true, but I believe there is more to it than simple sentiment,
or sugar coated platitude.
I believe that they are right here, all around us!
That plane of existence parallel to ours in which God's Kingdom is active.

Having said all that,
“The end times are not the end of the world,” N.T.Wright continues,
“they are the beginning of the real world.”

“For if this earthly tent in which we live is destroyed,
we have a building from God, eternal in the heavens.”

and

“the kingdom of heaven is - at hand!”

AMEN. ALLELUIA!