

TIME FOR CHURCH

I CHOSE TO GIVE THE TALK TODAY BECAUSE IT IS MY 75TH BIRTHDAY. I THOUGHT JUST THE FACT THAT I'M 75 YEARS OLD TODAY WOULD EMERGE INTO SOME KIND OF INSPIRATIONAL MESSAGE.

BUT THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN. GOING BACK AND FORTH TRYING TO THINK OF SOMETHING OF VALUE TO SAY MADE ME ONCE AGAIN ADMIRE *MARY. THOSE OF US WHO VOLUNTEER TO SPEAK. GIVE A TALK ONLY ONCE DURING THE SUMMER --- MARY PREPARES A MESSAGE FOR THE MAJORITY OF SUNDAYS. SHE DOES THIS WITHOUT ANY FINANCIAL COMPENSATION OR EXTRA ATTENTION - SHE DOES IT OUT OF STEADFAST GENEROSITY TO OUR COMMUNITY - THANK YOU MARY,*)

THIS MORNING I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU THE JOURNEY OF THOUGHT AS I PREPARED FOR TODAY'S TALK.

FIRST - WHAT ARE TOPICS RELATED TO 75 YEARS? O.K. TIME. JUST THE WORD TIME IS CONSTANTLY USED BY US. WE TALK ABOUT; TIME PASSED, EASTERN STANDARD TIME, FATHER TIME, TIME TO GO, OLD TIMEY, TIMES HAVE CHANGED. BUT HOW DO WE DEFINE TIME?

THE TEXTBOOK DEFINITION OF TIME IS ' THE INDEFINITE CONTINUED PROGRESS OF EXISTENCE AND EVENTS IN THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE, REGARDED AS A WHOLE.

I'M NOT SURE WHAT THAT MEANS. I AGREE WITH SAINT AUGUSTINE WHO SAID,; "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know."

THINKING OF TIME LEADS ONE TO THINK OF TIME PASSING. I ADMIT I THOUGHT OF ATUL GAWANDE'S BOOK, *ON BEING MORTAL'* AND JOAN DIDION'S BOOK *THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING*. AND ALSO CARLOS CONSTANATA'S *THE TEACHINGS OF DON JUAN* BOOKS FROM THE 60'S WITH THE THEORY THAT THE LUCKIEST PEOPLE ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT THEIR DEATH IS IMMANENT SO THEY CAN LIVE THEIR LAST DAYS WITH FULL AWARENESS.

I CERTAINLY THOUGHT ABOUT ALL THIS BUT I STILL COULDN'T 'GO ANYWHERE' WITH THE IDEA.

THEN, I WENT TO AN OLD FAVORITE; T.S.ELIOT. I WROTE MY MASTER'S THESIS ON ELIOT SO MANY OF HIS WORDS STAY IN MY MIND.

I'M SURE YOU REMEMBER THIS IS FROM *THE LOVESONG OF J.ALFRED PRUFROCK*:

I GROW OLD.... I GROW OLD....

I SHALL WEAR THE BOTTOMS OF MY TROUSERS ROLLED

SHALL I PART MY HAIR BEHIND? DO I DARE TO EAT A PEACH?

I SHALL WEAR WHITE FLANNEL TROUSERS, AND WALK UPON THE BEACH.

I HAVE HEARD THE MERMAIDS SINGING, EACH TO EACH.

I DO NOT THINK THAT THEY WILL SING TO ME.

ELIOT WAS ALL OF 29 YEARS OLD WHEN HE WROTE THIS --- SO WHAT DID HE KNOW ABOUT BEING 75?

ALTHOUGH I LOVE THE RESONANCE OF THE WORDS --- THE TRUTH IS, I COULDN'T DEVELOP ANYTHING MEANINGFUL FROM J. ALFRED PRUFROCK.

SO FINALLY, I WENT TO THE LECTIONARY WHICH WAS THERE FOR ME TO LOOK AT ALL ALONG. I'LL EXPLAIN SOMETHING ABOUT THE LECTIONARY. ALTHOUGH I WAS RAISED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AND HAVE ATTENDED CHURCH OFF AND ON ALL MY LIFE - IT WASN'T UNTIL OUR COMMUNITY BOUGHT THIS CHURCH AND WE BEGAN TO SHARE LEADING THE SERVICE, THAT I LOOKED INTO THE LECTIONARY, THE SUGGESTED READINGS THAT GO BACK HUNDREDS OF YEARS --- WHICH GIVES STRUCTURE TO OUR SERVICES HERE.

THERE ARE BOTH HEBREW AND CHRISTIAN LECTIONARIES, WHICH ARE SUGGESTED READINGS FROM THE TORAH OR THE BIBLE. THE CHRISTIAN LECTIONARY GOES ON A THREE YEAR CYCLE, WITH SUGGESTED READINGS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE GOSPELS. THESE SUGGESTED READINGS GO BACK CENTURIES – AND MOST CHURCHES FOLLOW THIS PATTERN EVERY SUNDAY.

MARY ENCOURAGES THOSE OF US WHO SPEAK TO USE THE SUGGESTED VERSES IF WE WANT, BUT THERE IS NO REQUIREMENT THAT WE DO.

I’VE NEVER FIGURED OUT HOW CERTAIN VERSES GET CHOSEN ON A REGULAR BASIS AND HOW THESE VERSES FROM BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS FIT TOGETHER.

THOSE OF US WHO SPEAK HERE TEND TO AT LEAST LOOK AT THE CHOSEN BIBLE STORIES/VERSES. OFTEN WE TAKE ISSUE WITH WHAT IS SAID IN THESE STORIES; FOR INSTANCE, THIS SUMMER BOB JONES TRIED TO UNDERSTAND THE IGNIGMA OF THE TRINITY--- HOW CAN THERE BE FATHER, SON AND HOLY GOST – ALL IN ONE PERSON, BLESSED TRINITY? HOW DO YOU THINK THAT THROUGH LOGICALLY?

ED CERNEY TRIED TO FIGURE OUT HOW – IN THE SUGGESTED NEW TESTAMENT READINGS -- JESUS ,THE PRINCE OF PEACE AND MIGHTY COUSELOR COULD ALSO SAY “DO NO THINK I HAVE COME TO BRING PEACE, BUT A SWORD.” AND ALTHOUGH WE HEARD GOOD THINGS ABOUT JACOB THIS MORNING --- LAST WEEK MARY TALKED ABOUT WHAT A SLIMEY TRICKSTER JACOB WAS.

OVER THE SUMMER WE’VE BEEN FOLLOWING JACOB--- FROM HIS BIRTH --W-- HOLDING ON TO HIS TWIN BROTHER ,ESAU’S, HEELS, STEALING THE BLESSING FROM ISSAC-- TRICKING ESAU OUT OF HIS BIRTHRIGHT THROUGH JACOB’S LADDER. TODAY YOU HEARD THE STORY OF JACOB AND RACHEL.

WE DISCUSSED THIS ONCE BEFORE IN MY TALK OF JULY, 2011. THAT SUNDAY WAS ON JULY 3, THE WEDDING ANNIVERSARY OF MY PARENTS AND ALSO KATE AND DUKE. AT KATE AND DUKE’S WEDDING, FATHER DONOHUE TOLD THE STORY OF JACOB AND RACHEL AS AN EXAMPLE OF PATIENCE AND FORBEARANCE.

HOWEVER, I COULDN'T SEE HOW THIS READING FIT IN WITH MY 75TH BIRTHDAY. BUT I CONTINUED READING AND REALIZED THAT THE DRAMA WAS JUST STARTING. I JUST WANT TO PUT THE STORY OF JACOB AND RACHEL IN CONTEXT. HERE WE HAVE A CLASSIC 'BAIT AND SWITCH' STORY --- AND JACOB IS THE VICTIM.

BUT JACOB IS NOT THE ONLY VICTIM IN THIS EXTENDED FAMILY. AS IT TURNS OUT, LEAH IS FERTILE – PRODUCING A SON PRACTICALLY EVERY YEAR FOR JACOB. BUT RACHEL DOESN'T CONCEIVE FOR MANY YEARS.

HOWEVER, NO MATTER WHAT LEAH DOES TO PLEASE JACOB, HE STILL PREFERS RACHEL. YOU CAN IMAGINE THE FAMILY DISCORD HERE --- A MAJOR THEME OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

SO WITH TWO WIVES – AND ALSO THE TWO MAIDSERVANTS OF RACHEL AND LEAH THAT JACOB ALSO BEDS--- JACOB ENDS UP WITH 12 SONS.

YOU KNOW WHERE THIS IS LEADING --- HIS YOUNGEST SON IS JOSEPH. AS IN JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAM COAT. ANOTHER BIBLE STORY FILLED WITH BROTHERLY COMPETITION AND DISCORD.

ONE THING THAT I HADN'T REALIZED UNTIL RE-READING THIS WAS THAT JACOB ALSO HAD A DAUGHTER, DINAH. HER FATE WAS BRUTAL AS WELL. SHE WAS KIDNAPPED, RAPED AND THEN PURSUED FOR MARRIAGE BY HER RAPIST -THE ENEMY, SHECHEM. HER BROTHERS REVENGED HER BY SLAUGHTERING SHECHEM AND ALL HIS MEN. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO DINAH – REALLY THE ONLY WOMAN – EXCEPT JUDITH THAT I CAN FIND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT THAT ISN'T JUST SOMEONE'S MOTHER OR WIFE.

I STILL COULD NOT FIGURE OUT HOW TO USE THIS FIRST SUGGESTED READING. THE LECTIONARY ALWAYS OFFERS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE FIRST OLD TESTAMENT READING AND FOR JULY 30 IT WAS THE STORY OF SOLOMON, THE SON OF DAVID AND BATHSHEBA – ANOTHER WILD AND TULMUTOUS ROMANCE ENDING WITH UNHAPPY AND FIGHTING SONS.

1 Kings 3:5-12

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.” And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.”

WOULDN'T IT BE A MIRACLE IF OUR PRESIDENT MADE THE SAME CHOICE?

I

THIS STORY IS FOLLOWED BY THE STORY OF THE TWO WOMEN – THEY ARE REFERRED TO AS HARLOTS ACTUALLY (I LOVE THAT WORD) WHO ARE FIGHTING OVER A BABY – THEY BOTH CLAIM IT IS THEIR BABY. I'M SURE YOU KNOW THE STORY; SOLOMAN CALLS FOR A SABER AND SAYS HE WILL CUT THE

BABY IN TWO AS A COMPROMISE, SO THEY CAN EACH GET HALF. OF COURSE THE REAL MOTHER SAYS, NO – LET HER TAKE THE BABY RATHER THAN KILL HIM.

SO WE HAVE THE STORIES – BUT STILL NOT A THEME TO FIT INTO THOUGHTS ABOUT BEING 75.

BUT THIS JOURNEY OF THOUGHT DID LEAD TO SOMETHING --- SOLOMON IS ALSO CREDITED WITH WRITING ECCLEISIASTES.

SO I WENT TO ECCLEASISTES;

IT IS NARRATED BY THE PREACHER. THIS IS A QUICK SUMMARY.

As king he has experienced everything and done everything, but nothing is ultimately reliable. Death levels all. The only good is to partake of life in the present, for enjoyment is from the hand of God. Everything is ordered in time and people are subject to time in contrast to God's eternal character. The world is filled with injustice, which only God will adjudicate. God and humans do not belong in the same realm and it is therefore necessary to have a right attitude before God. People should enjoy, but should not be greedy; no one knows what is good for humanity; righteousness and wisdom escape us. THE PREACHER reflects on the limits of human power: all people face death, and death is better than life, but we should enjoy life when we can. The world is full of risk: he gives advice on living with risk, both political and economic. Mortals should take

pleasure when they can, for a time may come when no one can.

HIS words finish with imagery of nature languishing and humanity marching to the grave.^[7]

IT SOUNDS LIKE A PREDICTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

FROM ECCLEASISTES COMES SUCH WELL REMEMBERED QUOTES AS ‘THERE’S NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN’ ‘VANITY, VANITY – ALL IS VANITY’ AND ALSO ‘**THERE IS A TIME. FOR’** **AHHH-----TIME--** MY ORIGINAL IDEA FOR THIS TALK.

FROM ECCLESIASTES

3 There is a time for everything,

and a season for every activity under the heavens:

2 a time to be born and a time to die,

a time to plant and a time to uproot,

3 a time to kill and a time to heal,

a time to tear down and a time to build,

4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,

a time to mourn and a time to dance,
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

HE GOES ON TO SAY;

He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet^[a] no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹²

I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³

That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴

THEN THE PREACHER – TALKS ABOUT JUDGEMENT. BUT AFTER WARNINGS ABOUT WICKEDNESS EVERYWHERE – THE TONE CHANGES BACK TO WONDER AND ACCEPTANCE.

¹⁸I also said to myself, "As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. ¹⁹Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath^[c]; humans have no advantage over animals.. ²⁰All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. ²¹Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"

²²So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?

WHAT COULD BE SIMPLER THAN THAT? WHAT COULD BE BETTER ADVICE FOR A 75TH BIRTHDAY?

THERE IS A GREAT MYSTERY OF LIFE AT THE CORE OF OUR EXISTENCE. BUT WE CAN'T KNOW THE ANSWER. SO ENJOY YOUR WORK, LIVE DAY BY DAY, LOVE WHAT IS AROUND YOU AND KNOW YOU ARE A PART OF THIS GREAT UNIVERSE. NOT THAT YOU WILL MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN THE UNIVERSE, IT'S SOMETHING ELSE. WE ARE A PART OF EVERYTHING AROUND US, INCLUDING THE ANIMALS. WE SHARE THE SAME FATE. JOHN'S FATHER, WHEN HE KNEW HE WAS DYING SAID HE HAD NO FEAR --- HE HAD SEEN ANIMALS DIE AND GO IN PEACE AND HE FIGURED HE WOULD GO TO THE SAME PLACE.

THESE THOUGHTS ACTUALLY FIT INTO THE GOSPEL VERSE THAT *IS* PART OF THE LECTIONARY TODAY. MATHEW 13.31-33 (*THIS IS USUALLY READ RIGHT BEFORE THE SERMON, BUT I'VE MOVED IT TO HERE*)

MATHEW 13;31-33;

ANOTHER PARABLE PUT HE FORTH UNTO THEM, SAYING. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED, WHICH A MAN TOOK, AND SOWED IN HIS FIELD;

WHICH INDEED IS THE LEAST OF ALL SEEDS; BUT WHEN IT IS GROWN, IT IS THE GREATEST AMONG HERBS, AND BECOMETH A TREE, SO THAT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR COME AND LODGE IN THE BRANCHES THEREOF

I PARTICULARLY LIKE THE FACT THAT THIS LITTLE MUSTARD SEED NOT ONLY GROWS INTO A GREAT TREE, BUT ALSO THAT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR LODGE IN THE BRANCHES THEREOF. IN BOTH MATHEW AND ECCLEASTIES WE ARE LINKED TO NATURE.

THIS JOURNEY OF THOUGHT STARTED WITH T..S ELIOT AND WILL FINISH WITH A QUOTE FROM HIM

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

READINGS FOR THE COMING WEEK

[Proper 12 \(17\) \(July 30, 2017\)](#)

- First reading and Psalm
 - Genesis 29:15-28
 - Psalm 105:1-11, 45b *or Psalm 128*
- Alternate First reading and Psalm
 - 1 Kings 3:5-12
 - Psalm 119:129-136
- Second reading
 - Romans 8:26-39
- Gospel
 - Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

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Year B (2017 - 2018)

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