

“What Endures”

November 18th, 2018
26th Sun./Pentecost
Thanksgiving Sun.
Stewardship Sun.
Heb. 10:11-25, Mk 13:1-13

¹¹*The priests do their work each day,
and they keep on offering sacrifices that can never take away sins.*
¹²*But Christ offered himself as a sacrifice that is good forever.*

Hebrews 10:11-12

Let us pray... O God,
Though death and competition in this world are a given,
help us to recognize that we have choices.
Help us to choose what is life-giving by accepting your forgiveness and love
and to show forth forgiveness and love to others.

Amen

Haven't we heard it said that the only sure thing in life
is "Death and taxes"?
Seems like a pretty cynical way of looking at what we can count on in life ,
still we can expect to pay some cost in terms of a toll, dues, or taxes,
and that – at some point, things come to an end.
In traditional cultures, the marketplace operates on the notion that
everything is for sale and you can bargain for the price you want.
There is a kind of game that merchants play,
and you have to understand the rules before you even walk into the store.
You have to know what your bottom line is for how high a cost you are willing to pay.
This is a good thing to know in life .
You have to know what you want and how important it is to you.
You have to know when it is time to walk out of the store
as a ploy to provoke a better offer – or to just keep going.

There's some maneuver room with taxes – if you know the rules or have a good CPA.
That's true about death, too – to some extent.
It is possible to 'cheat death', so to speak, for a while anyway,
thanks to advances in medical technology –
if one is not already practicing healthy habits,
like exercise and not smoking.

So, what lasts? What endures?

Well, Jesus said we have to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar,
and give to God what belongs to God.
He was being tricky, because it all belongs to God,
but there are some things we have a say about what Caesar
does with what has been entrusted to him.

Willard, p.2

Things are changing and in complicated ways,
but I believe that people are beginning to realize how we have a say
and that this has always been true for people here and everywhere.

What endures?

I have had some conversations where people are concerned about the 'end times'.
My answer has generally been to say that we are *always* in the end times.
We all have our date with destiny – our personal 'apocalypse' or 'revelation'
of Ultimate Reality.

Yet there are people trying to calculate the Big One as it were –
though we have already been told that is a waste of time.

There are those disasters in this life that can seem like the end,
and that can be bad enough.

Think of people in Syria and Yemen and California,
North Carolina, Puerto Rico, and north Florida suffering from disasters
natural and otherwise.

There are some 'apocalyptic' situations we can actually do something about –
like preparing for hurricane season, even if that is just an evacuation plan.

One sure thing is that – as long as we are alive in this world, we have choices,
whether we realize it or not.

Those choices may be limited, but there are choices just the same.

The big choice is to choose to embrace your life and its challenges –
to accept the cards you've been dealt and play them as best you can.

Another sure thing – for us as people of faith,
is the love of God for what God has created – meaning you.

Of all the human beings who have ever lived, God knows you and God loves you.
Like a good parent, God doesn't give us everything we want,
but provides us with what we need, even despite catastrophe.

An unfortunate thing that 'endures' is the competition that leads to violence –
that vicious cycle that seeks vulnerable people as decoys to be sacrificed.

Jesus warned his disciples in his mini-Apocalypse –
short version of the Revelation, that they would be
put on trial by the worldly powers.

In the Gospel of Mark's version of Jesus' teaching on the Mount of Olives,
he says that *they must endure* despite the persecution.

In the Gospel of Matthew's version, this is not so simple as tenacity,
but suggests his followers' love must endure as faith in action.

Salvation is not supposed to be simply about affiliation,
but by being true to the Gospel's message of rational loving-kindness.

Willard, p.3

Our lesson from Hebrews tells us that Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross was once and for all – literally.

Therefore – among Christians, there shouldn't be any more sacrifices because of what he did.

Because of what Christ did, the world has recognized the unjust murder of Mahatma Gandhi by extremists.

Because of what Christ did, the world has recognized the unjust incarceration of Nelson Mandela by extremists.

Because of what Christ did, the world has recognized the unjust murders of President Abraham Lincoln and Dr. Martin Luther King by extremists.

Because of what Christ did, the world has recognized the unjust murders of millions of Jewish people by extremists.

Because of what Christ did, we can recognize our own participation in the false 'sacrifice' of others and begin to stop acting unjustly and start loving and forgiving others and ourselves, too – and do our part to end that vicious cycle.

What endures?

'Death & taxes', the 'vicious cycle' of violence,
but also the love and forgiveness of God through Christ Jesus's self-sacrifice,
and the choice you have to respond with love and forgiveness, too.

I understand Jesus' teaching on the Mt. of Olives about the Apocalypse in this way:

*"So many will fall into scandal,
betraying one another and hating one another;
And many false prophets will be lifted up,
and many people will be drawn in by them.
But those whose love endures to the end will be saved,
and that is the Good News of the Beloved Community
that must be proclaimed everywhere
as a witness against extremisms.
And then the end will truly be... a beginning!
Amen*

Our lesson today from Hebrews 10:11-25

speaks of a time of transition for the early followers of Christ.

Though they were observant Jews, they were also challenging some traditions such that Jesus dying on the cross eliminated the need for sacrifices.

That still meant showing up on the Sabbath to get together for worship...

- ¹¹ The priests do their work each day,
and they keep on offering sacrifices that can never take away sins.
- ¹² But Christ offered himself as a sacrifice that is good forever.
Now he is sitting at God's right side,
¹³ and he will stay there until his enemies are put under his power.
- ¹⁴ By his one sacrifice he has forever set free from sin
the people he brings to God.
- ¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also speaks of this by telling us that the Lord said,
¹⁶ "When the time comes, I will make an agreement with them.
I will write my laws on their minds and hearts.
¹⁷ Then I will forget about their sins
and no longer remember their evil deeds."
- ¹⁸ When sins are forgiven,
there is no more need to offer sacrifices.
- ¹⁹ My friends,
the blood of Jesus gives us courage to enter the most holy place
²⁰ by a new way that leads to life!
And this way takes us through the curtain that is Christ himself.
- ²¹ We have a great high priest who is in charge of God's house.
²² So let's come near God with pure hearts
and a confidence that comes from having faith.
Let's keep our hearts pure, our consciences free from evil,
and our bodies washed with clean water.
- ²³ We must hold tightly to the hope that we say is ours.
After all, we can trust the one who made the agreement with us.
- ²⁴ We should keep on encouraging each other to be thoughtful
and to do helpful things.
- ²⁵ Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship,
but we must not do that.
We should keep on encouraging each other,
especially since you know that the day of the Lord's coming is getting closer.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Mark 13:1-13

¹As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him,

“Teacher, look at these beautiful stones and wonderful buildings!”

²Jesus replied,

“Do you see these huge buildings? They will certainly be torn down!
Not one stone will be left in place.”

³Later, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives across from the temple,
Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him in private.

⁴They asked,

“When will these things happen?
What will be the sign that they are about to take place?”

⁵Jesus answered:

Watch out and don't let anyone fool you!

⁶Many will come and claim to be me.

They will use my name and fool many people.

⁷When you hear about wars and threats of wars, don't be afraid.

These things will have to happen first, but that isn't the end.

⁸Nations and kingdoms will go to war against each other.

There will be earthquakes in many places,
and people will starve to death.

But this is just the beginning of troubles.

⁹Be on your guard!

You will be taken to courts and beaten with whips
in their meeting places.

And because of me, you will have to stand before rulers and kings
to tell about your faith.

¹⁰But before the end comes,

the good news must be preached to all nations.

¹¹When you are arrested, don't worry about what you will say.

You will be given the right words when the time comes.

But you will not really be the ones speaking.

Your words will come from the Holy Spirit.

¹²Brothers and sisters will betray each other and have each other put to death.

Parents will betray their own children,
and children will turn against their parents
and have them killed.

¹³Everyone will hate you because of me.

But if you keep on being faithful right to the end, you will be saved.