

## **THE FINAL GIFT**

MARCH 2, 2014

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This is Transfiguration Sunday, the traditional last Sunday of the Epiphany season. On this day we commemorate the occasion when Jesus took Peter, James and John to reveal to them the Divine within Jesus. This Sunday reminds me of the final burst of 4th of July fireworks before the darkness descends. Beginning with Ash Wednesday, Christians embark on the long period of reflection and, for some folks, self denial or fasting that is Lent. On the mountain, Jesus is revealed in his glory but then begins his walk to Jerusalem and the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. There will be no more white paraments. In our church, the gold cross in the Chancel will be removed and be replaced by one of wood.

My Lenten practice is an on-going reflection on the shadow of the cross that spans the world. The weight of that shadow is felt wherever there is war; wherever there is hunger, disease, persecution. Try as I might, I cannot change the world but during Lent, I select two or three organizations that are trying mightily to ease the sufferings of the lowly and I send small amounts of money.

Peter will be leading a Lenten Series, What's Theology Got to Do With It. There will be Lenten booklets available and Tom Taylor's Sunday Bible Study as well as my own Wednesday morning. Take some time during this season to reflect and study and pray during this season when nature turns toward Spring and new growth.

But I would like to reflect for just a moment on the other, very familiar reading from Ecclesiastes. It is used frequently in Memorial Services of, reflecting on all the times in life, particularly, the time to be born and the time to die. As thought-provoking as this passage is, it embodies an ancient Jewish belief. There is no life after death. All that is important, good, joyful and all that is challenging, painful or sorrowful takes place in the span of a person's life. Verses 12 and 13 describe the expectations for human life:

12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. 13 That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God.

This belief is not uncommon even today. There is something appealing about living life to the full, having fun and doing good while deriving great satisfaction from work. But we believe that we are both body and soul, flesh and spirit. We do not know what heaven is like or even what it means. We simply believe that there is something glorious beyond our human time span.

Hold on a minute, I apologize. My phone is ringing. Sorry. Sorry.

## **PHONE RINGS**

ADRI: Good heavens, it's God. Umm...Hello.

GOD: Good morning. I have been listening in.

ADRI: Really. Uhhh, how am I doing?

GOD: Not too bad. Could use some improvement.

ADRI: But, do you always listen in to sermons?

GOD: What is it called that you humans do, oh yes, Channel Surf. I do that once in a while, just checking in on all the characters who speak in my name. There are some who could use a well placed lightning bolt but I won't get into that right now. What you are speaking about interests me and I want to put my own two cents worth in. Lately, it seems that all my human children are walking around with a phone permanently attached to their ears. This seemed like a good way of getting your attention. Was I right?

ADRI: Well you certainly got my attention.

GOD: About time! What you are speaking about is very important to me. I am proud of my human children. You have done amazing things during the eons of your presence. Your intellect has grown and the contributions that you have made in science and technology and medicine are amazing. Not that long ago when a person became critically ill there was not much that could be done. I was always there as the family gathered to pray as they said their farewells. I gathered the soul of the loved one into my hands and brought him or her into a new existence where all souls are embraced in an everlasting love. It is glorious, if I do say so, myself.

ADRI: I think I know what you are going to say.

GOD: Excuse me; are you God?

ADRI: Oh my God; I'm sorry.

GOD: Don't worry about it, I was just joking. My point is that you have gotten so good at keeping people alive through machines that you need to consider what you want for yourself at the end of life. And you can't keep it a secret. You need to have good conversations with your loved ones so that they know just what you want for your last days. You humans have created ways to ensure that your wishes will be carried out. The first and most important is that conversation. Second and equally important is what you legal language lovers have named 'Advanced Directive.'

ADRI: Wow, God. Thank you.

GOD: Wait a minute, I am not finished

Adri: Sorry, God.

GOD: Isn't a sermon supposed to have 3 points? Here are last two. For my sake, tell your loved ones what you want for your memorial service. What hymns do you like? What scripture? What poetry? Do you want shared memories. Saves time and arguments, trust me. My final point is that you believe your life continues following death. Tell your families not to hang on to you beyond your time and let them help you to let go. You are born. You live. You die. And you are born into a new life beyond your ability to imagine. And I will be there to welcome you home. And for all the years before that final birth, know that I am always with you but not necessarily on your cell phone.

The Final Gift we have to give our loved ones is filling in and registering an Advanced Directive. In the coming weeks there will be many opportunities to come and talk together about what the Advanced Directive can provide for that possible time when those painful decisions have to be made. We will begin with a presentation by Cindy Bruzzese, the Director of Vermont Ethics Network on Tuesday, March 25. God is still speaking, in all forms of communication but not necessarily on a cell phone..

Amen

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