

The Twenty-Third Sunday

after Pentecost:

Proper 28 (C)

November 17, 2019

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

Our heart, and kidneys: is now, forever?

The Gospel: Luke 21:5-19

When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, Jesus said, “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them. When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from

heaven. But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your

head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Save us, Lord, for your mercy is great.

Amen.

A professor at my business school, several years after I was ordained, said he was walking across the campus and died. Actually, his heart had gone into fibrillation and he needed to be rescued by resetting his heart rhythm. (That’s a first year medical student talking, trying to sound a little too smart.) Fortunately, someone on campus knew how to operate a defibrillator and used

it to defibrillate him as he laid on the sidewalk. (About a three hour course is offered by the Red Cross and others on rescue first aid and on how to use the defibrillators—they are programmed and actually tell the person using them how to place the leads and when to trigger their impulse—'stay clear of the leads'--and person--is the required call of the user, and the patient always needs to be on dry ground in a safe place. The devices actually check the heart rhythm and will only administer a shock if a shock is necessary. These not-so-new-fangled devices are found in many public places in the US nowadays. And they

do save lives, as our professor attested.

About a million and a half are already using these devices in the US, but outside the US only a smaller percent actually get them.

About a hundred thousand are installed annually in the US. The current world market of about \$6-10 billion dollars is projected to grow at up to 5.3 percent per year, but lesser developed countries cannot afford them or the medical specialists who know how to install them. Since they are life or death devices, it behooves the manufacturers to be absolutely sure their pacemaker/defibrillator works for at least ten to fifteen years before it needs to be

replaced. But the demand for life is of course very high, and companies are desperately trying to produce devices which can be refurbished and reused, since every ten years or the current ones will need servicing. Wearable devices seem to solve some of the issues, since the surgeries are less demanding, but wearable devices are now still more rare than implants. The very newest devices are the size of a large vitamin pill, but they need to be inserted directly into the heart, so even higher surgical skills are needed for these, which are thought to be the 'wave of the future'. Several famous people have pacemakers or

have used them, such as Elton John, Ted Williams, and Stan Lee.

As time passes, the length human life will likely be expanded at a greater and greater rate due to the current research on everything from pacemakers to cancer treatments to solutions for the rarest of diseases. Being able to attain a maximum ‘biblical age’ of 120 does not seem out of reach if medical research continues on its current fast pace.

One of my current concerns is a recent study of thousands of children who have

hypertension by the age of 14, now almost in in twelve at age 14, and rising at a rapid rate. By about age 34, if untreated, and most will likely be untreated if current practices continue, their kidneys will be totally compromised and largely dysfunctional, leading to the greatest plague of dying thirty year old's ever. Kidney disease is often overlooked as being a future leading culprit of the death of our teenagers before age forty, in the midst of their family-raising years.

When the whole world is running towards a cliff, he who is running in the opposite direction appears to have lost his mind.

C. S. Lewis

As a disaster chaplain in New York City, I have been specially trained by the Red Cross in a variety of situations, including the scenarios of various nerve agents, dirty bombs, and numerous biological warfare agents—“weapons of mass destruction” was a course five of us Episcopal priests took to be ‘certified’ in preparation for “The End”. We were given details of what to expect in various situations; one of my priest friends

noted that the special ‘space suits’ that were demonstrated in the films we were shown cost \$30,000 each, but none of us were given one. I saw in one of those crime dramas on television, a wounded but alive SWAT officer said she was going to offer a thanksgiving to the inventor of Kevlar, since her life had been spared by wearing bullet proof vest. We disaster chaplains coined the moniker, “Black Canaries” to describe ourselves. A canary you may recall is what coal miners use to see if the air in a mine or ventilation shaft is toxic; the canary is very sensitive and falls to the cage floor if the air is unsafe.

New York City has a detailed plan for all of its emergency workers, fire, police, EMS, and we chaplains are a part of the mass care teams of the Red Cross in all major emergencies. In this disaster plan, a third of the emergency workers stay in the city and cope with the situation as best they can; a third retreat to New Jersey and upstate New York and come in to the City when the first third are 'depleted'. Then the final third who have retreated to Connecticut come in to replace the second third. Every hospital in the City has now been quietly outfitted with outdoor showers near their back entrances to their Emergency Rooms to be

used to decontaminate those emergency workers who suffered exposed to the various toxic agents. After decontamination they can be admitted to the Emergency Wards.

A not so oblique part of today's gospel reading harks to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and probably also to the Roman construction of a pagan temple to Venus which was built on the site of the original Jewish temple in around 125 AD when the previously destroyed city of Jerusalem was re-inhabited by the Romans and called "Aelia Capitoium". Many biblical scholars now think that the gospel of Luke appeared around 120 to 125 AD, far later than any of

the other gospels but contemporaneously with Aelia Capitolium.

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/archaeologists-bringing-jerusalem-s-ancient-roman-city-back-to-life-1.413874>

and

http://www.asiaexplorers.com/israel/church-of-the-holy-sepulchre_jerusalem.htm

I am a member of the Rotary Club and attended a day long presentation at the United Nations which is held for Rotary each year about this time of the year. I walked around the various exhibits people

had set up for the Rotary. But on the wall was mounted a special exhibition specifically for the United Nations photographed in and around the city of Chernobyl in the Ukraine, which as you may recall suffered the meltdown of its poorly designed nuclear electric generation facilities 44 years ago in 1972. The entire area was been evacuated due to radioactive contamination, and apparently a few are beginning to re-inhabit parts of the area, but photographers presumably in specially protected suits had gone back to photograph various sites in and around Chernobyl. Each picture on the wall had a description of what

was the picture's subject and then a note of how much radioactivity was present at that specific site. The Russian government had done some remediation of the sites and the picture showing by far the highest radiation levels was showing the metal tracks of bulldozers and other heavy equipment that had been brought in presumably to uncover the melted down nuclear core to permit its cooling and to cover over parts of the plant that had the highest levels of radiation. High radiation levels were found of course in some of the big cooling towers of the plant. But pictured also was a burned house, a contaminated lake, and an abandoned

town, all of which still had high levels of radioactivity. Sorry to say, this display gave me a sense of the reality of what we here could one day face. Much of the city remains on high alert, with police scanning backpacks randomly and Army troops monitoring transportation hubs. We take threats and potential threats seriously.

One sermon I read on this gospel noted that a group of futurologists see an increase of cataclysmic suffering at the end of human history. The second point was that no one knows when this will occur, but many people guess wrong. The third point was that Jesus will come at the end of history. Christ

will come to be the final judge. Christ will separate the wise from the foolish, the doers from the talkers, the righteous from the evil. Christ knows the hearts and actions of all people on earth, and it is Christ's role to be the final judge. To be the judge is not our role as human beings.

‘This is also another way of saying that time and history are in God's hands. Human history has a goal; human history will have an end; and that God will be present and ruling at the end of human history, just as God was at the beginning of human history. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of time.

‘Cosmologically, all the Biblical references to angels and angel’s choirs and angels blowing their trumpets are saying the same thing: God will be in control at the end of human history, just as God was in control at the beginning of human history. God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of human history.

‘You see, God who created the heavens and the earth in the first place, who created the evolutionary cycles and processes over billions of years, will be the same God who is working at the end of history. By analogy, the artist who began painting his landscape will finish his painting his

landscape. The musical genius who began composing his symphony will finish composing his symphony. The sculptor who began working with the marble rock will finish working with artistic composition in marble rock. Likewise with God. God, who began human history, who began the painting, who began the composition, who began the sculpture will finish his work of art. That is what the Bible says. When the Bible says that Jesus will come back on the final day, the Bible is saying that God will finish time and history, because time and history belong to God. As the spiritual says, “The whole

world's in his hands.” Time is in God's hands. History is in God's hands. God is alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. God is at both ends of time and history before there was time and history.

‘So the important question is this: how are we to live today? We are to live our lives as if Jesus Christ were coming back tomorrow. We are to live today as if the end of history was tomorrow morning. We are to live today as if we were going to meet God face to face tomorrow morning at 8:30 and have breakfast together. If you believe that; if you believe that human history is going to end tomorrow and you are going to

meet God face to face and have breakfast together, it will affect the way you live today. You won't have this attitude that is so prevalent nowadays, "Today is the first day of the rest of my life. The wind is at my back. My sails are full. I am sailing fast into my future of this planet." In such an attitude, there is no thought of God but only to live fully every day. It is pure secularity. Nor would your attitude be, "Eat, drink and be merry, because my time will soon be over." That attitude doesn't work if you are going to meet God first thing tomorrow morning for a cup of coffee, tea, or cocoa. Nor would your attitude be, "I have only one

time around. That's all there is for me, one time around." What a cynical attitude. One time around; it is over and into the grave. I won't be meeting God tomorrow morning.' That could be simple denial of our human condition.

‘Now, if it is true that you and I may have breakfast with God first thing tomorrow morning, what will we do today? Wouldn't it be a time of loving? Wouldn't we gather our loved ones around us? If we had a conflict with our mother and father, or our children or grandchildren wouldn't we be on the telephone today trying to patch up that old

quarrel? If we knew for sure that we were having breakfast with God face to face tomorrow morning, I am sure that there would be much prayer today. It would be a prayer of thanksgiving for knowing we may be having breakfast with God tomorrow morning. What confidence in the future. I expect not too many people would watch our favorite sport teams on television or go Christmas shopping.

‘Besides, the way that life happens so quickly and unexpectedly, we just may have breakfast with God tomorrow morning.’

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_c_futurologists_and_their_vision_for_the_future.htm

Amen.

Description: Life is often shorter than we think. Confidence--in knowing when the end will be--is misplaced, as only God knows. Christ told us to be prepared, to be ready. For it is when we take our lives as gifts only God can give, and give God thanksgiving, can we offer ourselves fully back to God. Medicine can give some answers, but only God can give solutions.

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C. S. Lewis

Tags: Chaplain, disaster, Manhattan, New York, nerve, threats, protection, biological, contaminate, Chernobyl, radioactive, hospital, world, time, futurologist, United Nations, pacemaker, defibrillator, heart, surgeon, medical, research, kidney, teenagers, forty, twelve, Elton John, Ted Williams, Stan Lee, hypertension, Red Cross, family-raising, refurbish, Our heart, and kidneys: is now, forever?