

January 21, 2018  
Third Sunday After the Epiphany  
1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Some of you are going to find my sermon illustration today quite painful. Others will think it's just stupid. The truth is, it's both.

St. Paul writes, *“This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.”*

Paul isn't really talking about being married or single, or about mourning or rejoicing or shopping. Paul is talking about what we value in the world and the importance we place on our relationships with people and things in the world. We are Christians and as such should value God's promises fulfilled in Christ above the things of this earth. Our restored relationship with God is eternal, is our highest good, and we should esteem it as such. But we too often we esteem that which is not eternal, that which often is not to our good, and that which is surely passing away.

Here is a very clear example. Last week there was a football game that ended very, very badly for the New Orleans Saints. It was a playoff game on the road to the Super Bowl. After going scoreless in the first half of the game, The Saints mounted a fantastic comeback and took the lead with minutes left. But because of questionable play calling and time management there was time left. Then on what should have been the final play and a Saints victory, a critical tackle was totally missed and the Vikings receiver scampered into the end zone and the Saints were defeated and eliminated from Super Bowl contention.

I was exhausted Monday because I was so upset I couldn't get to sleep. When I did find sleep I woke up again thinking about the loss. This happened like five times! The loss was that painful...and I am that stupid.

I mean think about it. Do the New Orleans Saints really have any affect on my life that I don't give to them? No. They take my time, sometimes my money, my thought and energy, but only because I give it. Without them life would continue and be fine, maybe even better.

My reaction highlights St. Paul's point. It would seem the Christians at Corinth were wondering if, in light of the Gospel message of Christ, it is better to get married or stay single. Paul actually says married folks may be more anxious about the world because they have a spouse they are worried about pleasing. But his point is not that people shouldn't get married. His point is that we who are in Christ should live in the certainty that the things of this world as we know it are passing away. These things shall one day soon be replaced by life in the glory of Christ in eternity.

This means that we should live our lives in a mindset and heart-set that is continually looking beyond the things of this world and toward life in the next. Even the good and weighty things of this world—marriage, death, happiness, wealth—all of these should pale and lose their priority when placed next to the fulfilled promises of God in Christ.

But do they?

I mean, I lost one night of sleep to a silly football game, but that was it. How many of us lie awake night after night worrying about the same important problem in our lives? How many of us feel that familiar tension crawling up the back of our neck over the same situation again and again?

I don't mean to trivialize these circumstances. Not being able to pay the bills is a tough situation. Having your body breakdown and fail is serious, sometimes crippling and painful. Wrestling with questions regarding the people you love dearly, serious questions like, "Are my children saved in Christ?" can be agonizing. These are not trivial things.

But every single one of these is eclipsed by your salvation which, when brought to ultimate completion, will leave these fears and concerns less than a distant memory in the eternal joys of paradise. God is in control. He always has been. He always will be. His plan of salvation in Christ worked out exactly as planned, despite the faithlessness of the Israelites, despite the assaults of Satan, despite the powers of this world thinking they'd won when they nailed Him to the cross. Victory over all things is yours in Christ today.

A big problem with our anxiousness about these things is that it is temptation—temptation to start believing that God is not in control, that somehow because life isn't working out the way we would have it be, somehow God's promise is defective. Anxiety and worry is letting the world take center stage and letting God's promises fade into the wings. St. Paul is saying, "Don't live in the world. Live in the promise."

I mean think about it. Do these situations we worry about have any power to affect the forever life you have in Christ? No. They can only push the promises of God out of the picture if you give them the priority and power to do so. Don't do that. In the promise of Christ you have the peace that passes all understanding. I guarantee, pushing Christ to the wings and focusing on the world will never, ever give you such lasting peace.

Thankfully, this exhortation of Paul is not a command we are to obey in order to receive salvation. It is a peace we are free to aspire to because salvation is already ours. It is in the free

forgiveness of sins by the cross of Jesus Christ that we can know and trust that ultimately, whatever it is we're facing, it will be alright.

Christ faced it all in our humanity—the complete loss of the world. All of its stuff and even His body itself were taken from Him in brutal fashion. And I can't say He didn't get anxious. That sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane sure seems like Jesus was stressed, maybe even tempted. But I know Jesus never gave up the faith. He always said and He always knew that despite the horror He would face, the Father would raise Him on the third day. And the Father did, just as was promised.

We can know that in Christ, it will be all right and, in a now but not yet fashion, it is already all right. This is what the Word and Sacraments assure us. In Holy Baptism, the Word of forgiveness, the body and blood of Christ, we know sins stand forgiven, death stands defeated, and resurrection is assured. It will be alright.

Paul is telling us not to allow any of the concerns of the world, even the really important ones, to overshadow this wonderful truth. Don't ever let the failings of a broken world make you think God isn't in control. He is, and it's going to be alright.

As for the world, I'm not going to tell you not to get anxious or worry about stuff. Football games keep me up at night. I'm simply not willing to be that big of a hypocrite. But as I lay there Sunday night in angst over the Saints loss being unable to sleep, I did pray a lot. I didn't pray about the Saints. I prayed about all sorts of stuff because a silly thing of the world had me all upset and I knew I was being stupid. So I prayed about all sorts of stuff, because when the world has you down, you can go directly to the One who has and will make it all alright.

When the important agonies of this life, your finances, your family, your health, even your death, come with heartache and worry, bring them into the light of God's promises fulfilled

in Christ. Bring them into the light of salvation. Bring them in prayer to the God who is in control. Bring them to the Savior who heals all of your brokenness.

In Jesus, you can know that this present situation of pain and angst, whatever it may be, is in the process of passing away. You stand right with God and He has and will take this burden from you. One day soon, it will all be all right.

Amen.