

Proper 27, C November 11, 2007

Living Equals Change/Growth

Today is Veteran's Day and we'll be singing a special hymn at communion in honor of our many veterans. But our Gospel story has a marriage question too and I saw this cute vignette that ties both together. A young man was stationed in a war zone. As a result of receiving many irritating letters from his wife, this World War II soldier earnestly appealed, "For goodness sakes, let me fight this war in peace!"

Don't you just hate it when someone asks a question when they're not really interested in the answer? The question itself is preposterous. The Sadducees weren't interested in the answer of whose wife she is after marrying all the brothers. They wanted to create a problem for Jesus. But it was also deeper than that—they wanted to prove that the resurrection of the dead was a false belief.

Jesus' answer is brilliant. The fact is that resurrection breaks all the rules, as we know them. Life after death is not the same as it is here on earth. But what do we know about that life? Is there anything concrete we can point to? All we know is what we've been told to believe by faith—and what we experience at the death of a loved one.

If you've ever had to face the death of someone you were close to, then perhaps you've noticed that your relationship to him/her doesn't end. They may visit you from time to time—sometimes in dreams, often through your thoughts, or you may hear the sound of their voice echoing in the room, or even experience the smell of their perfume or powder. There are many ways that those who have died are still present in our lives.

Although we can't prove any of this, we know it to be true in our hearts and minds. I know there are people who have loved ones died before they were able to resolve some conflict between them. Is there some way to bring comfort or resolution after death?

Jesus says there is. When Jesus Christ says that God is “God of the living” and he says God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph the great Patriarchs of the early Hebrew nation—he is stating that these people are alive in God’s realm.

Jesus Christ is giving us a window of understanding so that we can see that our lives do not end at death. So we can ask forgiveness and also forgive someone who’s died. We can experience the peace of mind of putting to rest whatever unresolved issue there might have been at the time of their death.

The business of life doesn’t end in death. Life continues into eternity. Is that good or bad? I don’t know how I feel about eternity with some folks! C.S. Lewis reminds us in his famous book Mere Christianity, that the main reason we should try so hard to become truly great people while we’re on earth is because the character we develop will be with us into eternity.

The important thing to understand is that God expects us to continue to grow and develop and change—up until our death. That’s such an important facet of life—that growth and change are inevitable. God is God of the living—God of life. There is an adage in congregational development that says that if you aren’t growing, you’re dying. It’s true of all living organisms—growth and change are an inevitable part of life.

So if growth and change are such foundational elements of life—why then is it so hard for us to accept that? There is the story of the woman who hand stitched a beautiful cloth, framed it and hung it over the mantle of the fireplace. It read, “Prayer Changes Things”. One day she came home and it was gone and she asked her husband if he knew anything about it. He told her he had thrown it out. “But don’t you believe in the power of prayer?” she asked. “Oh, yes, I do believe—but I hate change so I threw it out!”

Maybe there is an element of stubbornness or maybe it’s just plain laziness, but we are not good at adapting to changes and growth. I think part of the problem could be that we can’t see how the change and/or growth are going to be better than what we have now. I can understand that—but I also think that if we are willing to use our imagination and if we have confidence in the future, we have less concern about change.

God is God of the living—God desires our growth and development. God wants us to keep our hearts and minds strong by being creative, being able to envision alternative ways of doing things, accepting new ideas and continuing to learn.

We have many ways to engage your imagination and creativity and willingness to grow here at St. Paul's and I hope you will make use of the many ways you can become an active participant in your growth and development.

We'll start our Advent series in December, we're going on a mission trip to Honduras in January, we have a lively discussion group at the men's breakfast, and we have a group for young fathers. The MOM's group is winding down, but a new group will be forming in the spring.

The God of the living is there to lead you and guide you through your continuing understanding of what it means to be of service in our community. I hope you'll take the opportunity to learn. AMEN.