

Self Evaluation (Be On the Lookout)

Text: 1 Samuel 1:4-20

Hebrews 10:11-14 (15-18) 19-25 (Series B. 25th Sunday after Pentecost)

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Mark 13:1-8

As Jesus was leaving the Temple, one of his disciples said, "Look, Teacher! What wonderful stones and buildings!" Jesus answered, "You see these great buildings? Not a single stone here will be left in its place; every one of them will be thrown down."

Let us pray: Remembrance - Veteran Day

Remember, it's very difficult, if not near impossible, for a woman to know where her husband is at all times. Now, what do you call a woman who knows where her husband is all of the time? A *widow*.

I have this unusual habit; I like walking around graveyards looking at tombstones and reading the inscriptions about the lives of those buried there. During my years in Europe, we did some of this.

There are some very old cemeteries which are linked with churches, castles, and villages, and as I read the epitaphs, I couldn't help but try to figure out what kind of people they had been, what had been their life's work, and what were the circumstances of their death.

In some places, there were many graves of small children, and I guessed that some kind of illness had claimed their lives. In other places, I saw the graves of soldiers who had fallen in the many battles that have taken place over the centuries.

There is a particular epitaph; I believe it is in a churchyard in Cornwall, England, that reads:

- *Children she had five, three dead and two alive;
Those that are dead, choosing rather to die with their mother than live with their father.*

This is the inscription on the grave of a housewife.

- *Mary Weary, Housewife.
Dear Friends I am going Where washing ain't done
Or cooking or sewing. Don't mourn for me now
Or weep for me never: For I go to do nothing. Forever and ever!*

Other tombstone inscriptions include:

- *He never saw it coming.*
- *I told you I was sick.*
- *Job well done.*
- *Rest in Peace. Forever our Princess, etc.*

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a Swedish chemist by the name of *Alfred Nobel* woke up one morning to read his own obituary in the local newspaper while having breakfast. It read, "*Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in a war than ever before. He died a very rich man.*"

Actually, it was Alfred's older brother who had died; the newspaper reporter had messed up the epitaph. But the incident had a profound effect on Alfred Nobel. He decided that he wanted to be known for something other than developing the means to kill people efficiently and making a fortune in the process.

So, he initiated the **Nobel Prize**, the award for those who foster peace in our world. Alfred Nobel said, "Every person ought to have the chance to correct his epitaph in midstream and write a new one." Now you know the rest of the story.

We are almost at the end of the church year. It's at this time of the year that we talk about the end of things – the last things, the end of the world, Christ's second coming, and judgment. It is also a good time for us to do some soul searching of where life is taking us.

This is a good time to put on the brakes and take a look at life and see if we are heading in the right direction. In the process we may want to take the opportunity to do what Alfred Nobel did – "to correct our epitaph and write a new one."

If you died today, what would your family and friends write about you in your eulogy? What would they say about your Christian faith – your role in the church – the way you demonstrated your faith in your relationships? After the funeral, what would your friends say about you, over a cup of coffee or tea and a piece of cake? How will your neighbours and your co-workers remember you? This might sound a bit gloomy but if you were to write your own eulogy, what would you say about yourself?

A way to do this would be to write down the significant people in your life – your parents, spouse, children, neighbours, people at work, the boss, friends or members of a club or organization that you are part of. Then write what each of these people would say about you as a person and your relationship with them. Don't forget to put God on that list. What do you think God would write about you and your life?

I'm sure you would join me and soon notice how careless we have been with the people we love. We live life as if there will be another tomorrow. We get preoccupied and caught up in so many things. We are always so busy. In our busy-ness we put things off as if there will be a never-ending supply of tomorrows.

Jesus reminds us, today, in the gospel that even the most beautiful and the most awesome things in this world would come to an end. The temple in Jerusalem must have been a marvelous building. It was a masterpiece of craftsmanship. But even this building, as magnificent as it was, would come to an end, Jesus said. And it did. The Roman army, under the command of *General Titus*, conquered Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and completely destroyed the temple; he left one wall, known as the 'wailing wall' as a reminder. The reality is that there is not a never-ending supply of tomorrows. We don't know when we will take our last breath. It may happen suddenly, giving us no time to make up for the important things that we have left undone for so long and the relationships that we have ignored.

Jesus tells the story of the Rich Man who had a beggar living on his footpath – Lazarus was his name. The Rich Man died and went to hell. Suddenly he realized his mistake – Lazarus was his neighbour but he had been too caught up in making money and throwing big parties for his cronies. Now it was too late.

As we focus on the reality that there will be a time when time will end – either at the end of the world or at the moment of our death – it's a good thing to stop and examine where our lives are heading. Reassess where you are at this moment in your relationship with God. Do I trust God? Do I have a real sense of peace knowing that God is ready to help me, guide me, and support me? Is my faith only head knowledge or is it something deeper that really affects everything that I do in my daily life –example:

- the way I interact with people,
- the way I focus on God and his love for me?
- the way I forgive those who have deeply wronged me?
- Can I forgive myself for the wrongs of the past?
- Can I learn to live in grace and peace that comes from God?

I'm not telling you anything new when I say that when we die, we will stand before the throne of God. At that moment, all that will count is – not your job, not your bank account, not your status or fame, not your successes – all that will count is that Jesus has died for us, and what our response was to his finished work on the cross.

What is the greatest comfort that you can give your family, when it comes time for you to leave this life? Their ultimate consolation is to know that Jesus is your Saviour, that your faith in him has led you to rely on him, to trust him in every moment of trouble. They will be comforted knowing that, even at the point of death, you know where you are going and who is leading you there. The greatest comfort you can give your family is the assurance that you are in God's hand, where there are none of the troubles of this life.

Finally: I would hope that the inscription on your headstone would be better than the one on an *auctioneer's grave*, which simply reading: "*Going!! Going!! Gone!!*"

I would hope that your eulogy would tell how you loved and trusted God; how your eyes fixed on Jesus when the going got tough; how you knew that Jesus has forgiven you, making it possible for you to attain eternal life and confess boldly, "*Jesus is my Lord and Saviour.*"

I would hope that those attending your funeral would be able to reflect on:

- how you cared for them,
- encouraged them,
- showed them Jesus,
- prayed for them,
- enjoyed life with them, and
- worked honestly alongside them.

I would hope that when it came to that day, your funeral would be a celebration of your entrance into eternal life. I would hope that those who gather on that day would experience an inner peace and joy knowing that Jesus died for you and that you trusted in him for forgiveness and eternal life.

It was warm and breezy that mid-day as Jesus was leaving the temple with his disciples; he gave them a lesson on how temporary things in this life really are, as he spoke of the almost unthinkable – the destruction of that magnificent building.

In the documentary "Life after People," according to engineers, Hoover dam will last for about 10,000 years, and only an earthquake will bring it down. Our place in this world is even more temporary than some of the things we build. However, there is a permanent home waiting for us in God's house.

In the meantime, it's good to do some soul searching because we can so easily be distracted by arguments and trivia things of this life. The writer of Hebrews tells us to *have the confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us...* by our faith, we are cleansed in body and in heart, so "*Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful*" (Hebrews 10:23).

Let us keep faith in practice and in hope. Birth pangs are the beginning of the labor that will deliver new life that awaits us. At the same time, let us continue to encourage those whom we love to do the same because soon, very soon we are going to see the King.

I am sure you are wondering what is going to be my epitaph on my headstone; mine is quite simple: "*Forgiven*" just one word, 'Forgiven' 4GIVEN.

You see, my friends, when I stand before God, the only thing that will count is the finished work of Christ Jesus on the cross...and my response to Christ's atonement of my sin. Because of Jesus our Saviour, we are welcome to eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son,
and whoever believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Amen.

Let us pray: Loving, Patient God, grant us faith-filled confidence in the Gospel to take on the mantle of servanthood in Your Name with continuous hope. Show us the righteous path of life, as we strive to set the needs of others above our own, un-swayed and undeterred by false prophets who would lead us astray. We ask through Christ, our Great High Priest; the Holy Spirit, our Counselor; who with You, are One God, now and through all Eternity. **Amen.**

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeois, Ellen Eriksen, the dire situation in Afghanistan and the Middle East, Refugees in Belarus & COVID-19 patients, essential and frontline workers, Christian Aid Workers held as hostages in Haiti, and Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **O Canada # 892**
- **Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me # 767**
- **My Eyes Have Seen the Glory # 890**