

The Presence Of The Eternal

Sunday, July 29, 2018

I want you to take your insert and look at our collect of the day. This is the prayer that I'll pray on our behalf in the final part of our service today. I'm going to read it now:

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

When I first came across this collect, the part that struck me was the phrase: "that we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal." Pass through the things temporal. Pass through the temporal. The temporal--the things that don't last; the stuff of life; our things, but our bodies, too. Our life on earth--it's temporal. It's in *time*. And in time, all things pass away.

In the prayer, this seems to be contrasted--it seems to be set at odds against this other phrase: "That we lose not the things eternal." The eternal. We don't want to lose 'the eternal.' That which does *not* pass away; that which time *cannot* destroy. Unseen things perhaps--not things at all, really. What are the "things eternal" exactly? Apparently they are vitally important. We are told we do not want to lose them.

I hope you can follow my line of thought. When I read this prayer, I saw things temporal on one end of a spectrum and things eternal on the opposite end. Diametrically opposed. Not the same things at all.

And I didn't like it! "Hey!" I thought. "I happen to *like* the things temporal. Don't go poo-pooing temporal things. Do not *disrespect* the stuff of life, please, Book of Common Prayer." I was really very distressed by this prayer. Because putting the stuff-of-life on one end and the 'things eternal' on the other end of some spectrum, and calling the stuff of life "bad," and calling whatever the-things-eternal means "good", just doesn't work for me.

But then I read our scripture lessons for the day. And all I could do was smile.

Because, see, what our scripture lessons do for us when they are set alongside this prayer, is that they shine the light bulb on behind the prayer. They illuminate it for us. They fit it all together in wonderful juxtaposition.

And I love the Track 2 scriptures. They show us the Old Testament story that is picked up like a thread and *woven* into Jesus' story in the New Testament. **First** Elisha feeds a crowd with a few barley loaves and some grain; **then** Jesus feeds 5,000 with a little boy's lunch of bread and fish.

Did Jesus say to a hungry crowd: “Don’t worry about the things temporal, silly people; just be sure you don’t lose the things eternal.” No. He didn’t. He took some bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it away; and in the giving, all were satisfied. In the giving, everything was multiplied.

In today’s stories, what is temporal is transfigured. The light of God illuminates it. The light of God reveals it for what it really is: the temporal is **miracle and sacrament**. Bread becomes the means to nourish not only the body, but also the soul. The things temporal and the things eternal are not on opposite sides of the spectrum. Throw the spectrum away! The things temporal and the things eternal are married; they are divinely intertwined. They are mutually illuminating. Plain old boring bread becomes the bread from heaven: God’s love and God’s provision.

So, when we think of it that way, how do you feel about bread! I don’t know about you, but I find the reminder to be refreshing. I guess bread doesn’t look different or taste different, and yet, when I think of things in this sacramental way, bread is transformed.

Here’s another take on it. John O’Donahue, the wonderful poet/philosopher, wrote about beauty. He took the phrase: “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” and he put a new spin on it. And I’m sure he’s not the only one who’s done this before. He said, it’s not so much that the phrase is talking about how beauty is *subjective*--or, in other words, it’s not just that different people find different things to be beautiful--but rather, it’s not about the beautiful object or person to begin with. Rather, when John O’Donahue says, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” he means, “Your eyes need to be transformed.” If you want to see beauty, have a gaze that can see it, that can detect it. *Beautify your gaze*. “Beauty is in *the* eye of the beholder.”

Let’s go back to our original phrase, “that we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal.” How do we hear it now, in light of everything that’s been said?

Does “pass through” mean, “just pass it by; it’s not worth anything...” or can we hear it as, “pass through the things temporal *in such a way* that we do not lose the things eternal”? In other words, it’s about the *quality* of our passing through. It has to do with the way in which we are going about our everyday lives.

In fact, ironically, if we understand the phrase to mean: “Don’t pay any attention to the temporal things”, we may in fact find that we actually *lose* the ‘things eternal’!

So this is where we land: “Go about your life in such a way, that you’ve got eyes to see the *presence of the eternal* everywhere you look.”

God’s grace in a piece of bread. Plain old bread.

The love of God in the hard work of marriage. A plain, old, everyday marriage.

Resurrection in every sunrise.

Faith at work every winter.

God's joy in every simple act of friendship and hospitality.

May we beautify our eyes so that we will not lose the things eternal.

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen