

‘What’s Next?’
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based on Hebrews 10:11-25

Every year it’s the same! We come to this point in the Christian calendar when we face our mortality. Hopefully we do this by faith, and not with anxiety.

The Christian calendar is a cyclical cycle of giving and receiving; living and dying...from Advent through Pentecost we learn to share with one another what it means to be loved by God.

We do that primarily through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and how we understand those teachings in today’s context.

Sometimes the readings in the Bible (especially this time of year) lead us into the season of reliving our dying in order to be born again...to be made new.

They can also lead us into a season of facing our mortality and thinking about our dying and wondering “what’s next”?

What is it that changes in our decision-making processes, our priorities, or the language we used around friends and loved ones when we think we are approaching the last day?

There are many theories about what happens next. Like I said a few weeks ago, no one really knows with absolute lived experienced certainty ‘what’s next’...which is why we say we only know ‘by faith’...and we live in hope that what’s next is a wonderfully, peace-filled place of total love. ...no hate, no fear.

We live by hope.

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Faith is this surreal state. We can trust by faith. We can make our decisions based on faith. And...we can die by faith...because we have something gifted to us; shared with us; and something so important...Jesus was willing to die for it.

That is the assurance of God’s love for us so great, so wonderful, so perfect we now have a context to frame our worries and anxieties.

The writer to the Hebrews proposed his theology of dying...and it has everything to do with what happens now while we’re still living...not just worrying about ‘what’s next?’

Why is that a big deal?

Because we no longer have to be anxious or worried about ‘what’s next’! Jesus took away the fear and worry about dying! We are free to live today without making decisions based on fear; but to make decisions with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

The writer to the Hebrews said, it is then we can consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.

It is then we can focus on encouraging one another.

Frederick Buechner (I quote him often) says this is a big deal because:

“What is new about the New Covenant, is not the idea that God loves the world enough to bleed for it, but the claim that God is actually putting his money where his mouth is.”

Do we believe God’s power to love endlessly is so amazing we are willing to put our money where our mouth is?

We often say God’s word through Jesus is a ‘living’ word. That means the heart of the message of Jesus Christ who is our friend, mediator, intercessor, savior, high priest (whatever descriptive reference resonates with you)...that heart is beating

...pumping blood into the every sinewy fiber of our beings.

That heart is not dead!

[This is for the youth:] Jesus is not an ancient, 2000 year old story...Jesus is now! Jesus came to dinner last night! Did you see him?

He was here! Not only among us...but within us.

So when we get to this time of year when talk about ‘what’s next’, we decide whether or not we are ready to face our mortality with bold confidence. Are we ready to act boldly so that the living, breathing, blood-pulsing message is shared as though it were Jesus inside us speaking and acting on his behalf.

Are we ready for what’s next?

If we can say “yes”, then we have the confidence to be bold in our ministry and mission.

With bold assurance, we can:

- embrace our children and youth as they begin to explore their own understanding of faith
 - our children and youth are exposed to visual images of terror most adults never saw until much later in life!
 - our children and youth are growing up in an age of technology that allows them to communicate instantaneously...that can be good and also very unsettling.
 - our children and youth have not yet matured their understanding of the world that can filter the fear through the lens of faith.
 - that should scare us adults enough to find the time and space and the patience to encourage them so they know love can conquer fear

- interact with our neighbors and friends in ways that are mutually encouraging and beneficial
 - one sided relationship building is self-destructive. Our faith should help us find ways to build one another up...even when the other person seems to only be on the receiving end.

- finding opportunities for the receiver to be in the position of giver is vital to the life of the church
- we can risk our resources (both human resources and financial resources)
 - today we consecrate the commitments of time, talent and treasure: resources we need to share in order to build the church and encourage one another in faith
- we can enter boldly in ways of “giving, receiving, offering, loving and living one’s life as a sheer gift” (Debra Dean Murphy)
 - we give, receive, offer, love and live because we see those things as a gift of God.
 - That in itself is the foundational belief that builds a life of faith!

Horatio G. Spafford wrote, ‘It Is Well with My Soul’ in 1873 while mourning the loss of his four daughters when their ship sank in a trans Atlantic crossing.

Overcome by grief, Spafford, was forced to come to terms with the whys and how comes of such personal tragedy and loss.

Jesus followers since that time have sung the hymn ‘It Is Well with My Soul’ in times when the living word is all that makes sense in highly emotional, conflicted, questionable, and anxious filled times.

For our children and youth, the hymn has little meaning at this point in their lives. It will be our jobs, for those of us who sing it with tears in our eyes, to encourage our children and youth in the faith.

Because, someday, the message in that hymn could be important when they wonder, ‘What’s next?’

Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Holy and loving God, we seek your comforting and encouraging presence as we worship you this day. Help us to learn to filter fear through the lens of love and share that love with others.

We strive to live by faith being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

We pray for our children and youth...and we pray for the adults who take the time and make the effort to gather them together in this sacred, holy space. We pray we all embrace them and love them and share with them the good news that guides them.

We pray for the people of France. In their shock and grief, may your comforting presence bring them a sense of peace. We pray for France’s leaders and for the leaders of the world to be faithful in their response to threats and terror.

We pray for the church of Jesus Christ...that as a people we may come together to respond in ways that overcomes evil and pray unceasingly for the well-being all your children.

We live by hope trusting in the power of grace alone turning over to you the prayers we list on our prayer page; the prayers we named out loud; and the tender prayers we keep locked deep in our hearts.

In the loving name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.