

Column

A pack of napkins were plopped down for use at the coffee hour that was to follow the morning church service. Obviously the one who brought them had received them as a gift and did not know anything else to do with them but ‘give them to the church’. The giveaway were the words printed on them: “Life’s uncertain; eat dessert first!”

Life is uncertain as we were reminded by the recent tragedy in Miami where a large portion of a multi-floor concrete condo caved in on itself, leaving only a massive pile of rubble. At the time of writing, 18, two of whom are children, have been determined dead with upwards of 145 missing.

For those old enough to remember, watching the replay of this building going down brought back memories of the floors of the Twin Towers descending in like manner on 9/11, one on top of each other. In both cases, something that appeared so secure, a place where people went about their daily business without a thought, vanished leaving only a cloud of particles.

More significant than the loss of property was the human loss. Children were left orphans, husbands without wives, wives without husbands, old and dear friends parted, all without warning and in a few seconds. Words from the Bible come to mind: “For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

No doubt those in the Miami condo went to bed that night with plans for the coming day. There were business deals to be made; items at the grocery store to be bought for the following evening’s dinner; phone calls to be placed to family members, airline tickets to be booked. In short, it was a day like every other day, yet none of these planned activities took place.

Perhaps as you watched this tragedy unfold you found yourself asking: What is the answer to the dilemma of the uncertainty and brevity of human life? The answer I would give can be summarized in a single word – ‘gift’. Accept each day as such and you won’t be disappointed.

Upon arising, thank God for the gift of this day, offer it back to Him, ask Him to give you the wisdom and strength to accomplish the tasks He lays in your path, let your focus be more on others than on yourself and accept with thanksgiving any joys and pleasures that may come. This is only a start, but it is that.

What gives ultimate purpose and meaning to life is not the quantity of days but their quality. Beyond this, for the Christian there is the conviction that there is something more. Death is not a period but a comma in a much longer sentence. St. Paul puts us on the right track when he writes: "If this earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1).

So, how should we live life? Eat desserts first for tomorrow we die? This is certainly the way of the world, of those without hope for anything beyond this present age. There is, however, a better way. It is found in the One who said: "I am the way, the truth and the life" and made good on these words when He rose from the grave on that first Easter morning.

Instead of going for the banana pudding alone, go for Jesus and no doubt you will get the banana pudding thrown in besides!

O God, who hast prepared for those who love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer).

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