

## Sun. next before Advent (2020)

In the city where I grew up there was an old dilapidated building at the intersection of two major streets.

It began life as a hotel, but by the time I came along, it had long ceased to be a respectable establishment. Rather it had become a place for the down-and-outs to congregated and slept.

What made it a landmark was the giant red neon sign near the top of the building, reading: **“Eternity: Where will you spend it?”**

No one going either direction could escape this message.

Even after the building was no longer being officially occupied, someone continued to pay the electric bill to keep that message shining in the night sky. Why?

I don't know for sure, but I suspect it was because this person wanted those who passed by to be mindful that there was more to life than the present. The choices people make here are real and count.

With that thought in mind, I want to speak to you this morning on the subject of "Holy Mindfulness".

Indeed, I think it is fair to say that this is the message of this morning Old Testament lesson from Ecclesiastes.

Here, one called the Preacher -- traditionally identified as King Solomon (though many modern-day scholars are doubtful) -- is speaking. He seems to be at the end of his life and thus qualified to dispense wisdom.

Looked at from a purely naturalistic standpoint, life doesn't seem to have much

meaning or purpose. It's just one darned thing after another, and then you die.

It might be compared to children blowing soap bubbles in the sun? Those bubbles sparkle and delight the eye. They appear full of promise and create desire.

But what happens if you reach out and try to take hold of one . . . as children so often do?

They go way. They have no lasting substance.

The same is true of many of the things men pursue in life -- possessions, power and pleasure, to name a few.

Like bubbles in the sun these things allure the eye, but soon are gone.

Have you ever found yourself contemplating life and perhaps coming to the same conclusion

to which the Preacher comes in Ecclesiastes, ‘All is vanity’? Vanity meaning futility, emptiness, meaninglessness.

But, is this the preacher final conclusion on the matter? Should it be our final analysis of the situation?

No, one factor is missing. That factor is God and eternity.

I think the Preacher leaves it out deliberately.

He does so in order to strike down all the false notions about life. Then and only then is he able to reveal his hand . . . to give his final verdict in the matter, the deep wisdom, which is:

**“Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”**

This is the gateway of finding meaning in life.

If you think about it, what the Preacher does in Ecclesiastes has similarities with what Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15. There in his famous resurrection chapter he says:

**“If in this life only we have hope . . . we are of all men most miserable.”**

If this is all that there is, it is all vanity, futility, vexation of the spirit.

But for Paul and the Preacher this in fact is not the case, as they go onto show.

There is a God. There is eternity. There is a heaven to be won, a hell to be avoided. There is the resurrection of the dead at the last day. There is everlasting life.

Holy Mindfulness is living life in the light of eternity, and that is what both Paul and the Preacher would have us to do.

Living life in this way has at least three dimensions: past, present and future.

Past includes remembering what God has done in former times, First, in history.

For the ancient Israelites, God's past acts of grace and mercy included the deliverance He provided for them when they were slaves in Egypt. With a strong hand He brought them out and planted them in their own land.

But, God's past acts of grace and mercy are more than corporate acts. They also include those God has done for us as individuals.

Reflecting on these acts gives us a sense of calm in the midst of life's current storms. God's past acts predict His future ones.

The God who has been faithful will be faithful. The God who has provided will provide. The God who has been merciful will be merciful.

What storms are you going through at the present time?

Whatever they are God is more than able to still the troubled waters. Remember the past.

We are just days away from Thanksgiving. I encourage you to engage in some 'holy mindfulness' as the day approaches. Name your blessings one by one.

Looking back is one dimension of Holy Mindfulness, but so is living in God's presence in the now.

The person who did this as well as anyone I have met was our own Jane Koster, whom we lost earlier this year.

Before she had to move into an assisted living home, on a number of occasions, I was called upon to give her a ride.

Maybe it was to a medical appointment or to some event at the church; regardless, I don't think there was a time when she did not marvel at something she saw on the roadside. Maybe it was some bulbs that were in bloom or a flowering tree or a new calf with his mother in a field.

She was mindful of small things and gave God the glory. She radiated a thankful spirit.

I challenge you to learn from Jane, and I will try to do the same myself.

But there is a third dimension to Holy Mindfulness, and that's its future dimension.

This dimension has to do with latching onto and resting in the promises made to us in scripture . . . taking them with us into the future.

For example, Jesus told His disciples shortly before His ascension, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

What a strengthening thought that is. Whatever is going on in my life I am not alone. The divine Strengthen stands ready to help. The future may be all unknown, but I have this promise. I will take my stand on it.

Holy mindfulness – past, present and future -- leads to contentment and calm, meaningful service to God and neighbour. It opens the way to living life to the full.

God has the big things taken care of. There is no reason for anxiety.

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Instead of life being ‘one darned thing after another’, life becomes a journey with a destination and many delightful stops along the way.

You all have heard the joke about the atheist laid out in his casket sporting his best suit, tie and shirt and someone walking by saying:  
**“What a pity. All dressed up with no place to go.”**

Well, that’s what life is like without God. All is vanity and vexation of the spirit, and then you die.

But life does not have to be this way. The preacher set us onto the right track when he says fear God and keep His commandments.

What is His chief commandment to those of us who live on this side of the cross?

Well, we get our answer in Paul's words spoken to Philippian jailor:

**“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”**

One of the fruits of the salvation that comes by believing on Jesus is deliverance from meaninglessness. In Him is life, the fullness of life, and joy for evermore.

Allow me to close by saying: remember eternity /// and have a good party.

What do I mean by these words?

Simply this: Go for the gusto in life, but go with God.