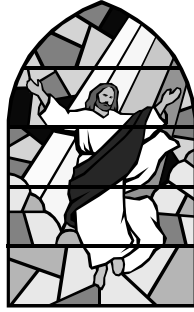


GROWING INTO TOMORROW



If you don't know where you are going, then any road will get you there. – Lewis Carroll

Scripture:

Numbers 8 23-26

The Lifecycle of the Levite Priests

²³ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ²⁴This applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upwards they shall begin to do duty in the service of the tent of meeting; ²⁵and from the age of fifty years they shall retire from the duty of the service and serve no more. ²⁶They may assist their brothers in the tent of meeting in carrying out their duties, but they shall perform no service. Thus you shall deal with the Levites in assigning their duties.

John 12 1-8

Mary Anoints Jesus

¹Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'



PALM SUNDAY

Holy Week begins next week and next Sunday is Palm Sunday. We have happy traditions celebrating Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. We will gather and be reintroduced to our beast of burden, and celebrate the most joyful day in the ministry of Jesus.

Celebration of the Last Supper invites us to share the substance of Christ.

GOOD FRIDAY

Good Friday services follow the next day. Someone reminded me that "celebrating" Good Friday is hardly the right word for the observance of the day of Jesus' crucifixion. So ours will be a service of remembrance; the way of faith can be as difficult as it is joyful. From a triumphant pinnacle, to the depths in five days is a great spiritual and emotional shift. Yet, the sudden changes of fortunes, the sudden challenges are something we have all known.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Following that, Maundy Thursday – the "mandated day" – originates one of the two sacraments of the Christian Church. The Catholics call it the Eucharist, the Jews celebrate the Passover Seder Celebration. For Presbyterians the

EASTER

In two weeks, Easter celebrates the resurrection. The spirit triumphs, life reclaims itself in the spring from death in winter. Witnesses saw Jesus beside the garden tomb, at the Sea of Galilee, and on the Road to Emmaus. They recognized him in the breaking of the bread, just as we do to this day. They were amazed, confused, lifted up, energized, and questioning all at once. This was a day unique in the history of our church.

This is Easter, and we will celebrate with our choir's Easter Cantata, our brass band, refreshments before church, and continental breakfast afterwards. Our floral Cross and sanctuary will be dressed to celebrate.

"THE EASTER SERMON"

But here is something that I could not help but notice. I noticed that if I had any hopes of giving an "Easter sermon," I'd better do it today. Otherwise, nada - too much going on.

So I have Easter in my heart today, and it's been a week filled with uplifting spiritual ideas. So I have called my Easter sermon, "*Growing Into Tomorrow*." That is what Easter is all about – growing into the future. The alternative is decaying, or dissolving into tomorrow. That is not a very attractive way to face the future, and we don't have to do it.

WE SANG A SONG ABOUT GROWING INTO THE FUTURE

Its simple message is that God has been with us at every step.

- "I was there to hear your first words." I think of my own first words, which I don't remember, and the first words of our child, which I remember better. God was surely in this first communication with Dad and Mom.
- I was there the day you were baptized.
- I was there when you wandered to find where demons dwell.
- I, the Lord, was there when you were no longer young.

- I was there when you found a special friend.
- I'll be there when evening closes in. Yet, with one more surprise. I was with you all the way along.

Remember that!

We were never stuck. God has been with us all along. There was no stage where the energy of God was not just as available to us as the electricity in a light socket. There are no power outages.

OUR STRENGTH IN TIME OF TROUBLE

God is always our strength, our help in times of trouble, and perspective when we get too full of ourselves.

We are God's children at every stage of our lives. There is no stage at which we are called as slaves to a station in life, a location at the end of the road, an unbending culture, and stifling conditions. There are opportunities for our ministries at every stage of life, and in every place, if we will just remember to whom we belong, and what God has called us to do. Let our prayer be for a future worthy of our calling. –jhc

NEVER STUCK

In a nutshell, that is Easter. Easter means you never have to be stuck. If we think we are stuck, then it is a condition we have selected for ourselves. That is a principle of psychotherapy, that is a principal of physical therapy, and they are based upon a principle of spiritual therapy that can be traced to the resurrection.

Remember when Ryan told Jenny, in *Love Story*, "Love means never having to say you are sorry"? We all knew that was baloney when he said it. I think he should have said, Love means never having to say you're hopeless.

What is true of individuals is true of groups of individuals.

THE LEVITE PRIESTS

The Hebrew Scripture this morning is a reminder of the lifecycle of the priests. They were important to the community at every moment of their lives. And what is true of the priests is also true of the people they served.

THE ANOINTING

In the New Testament is a significant moment in the life of Jesus – preparing for burial. Mary washes Jesus’ feet, and dries them with her hair. She perfumes his skin to add a fragrance and cream to his skin. Even for this act of love there was a critic. Jesus points out the symbolic meaning of what she has done.

FIVE THEOLOGICAL TASKS

So for Easter, I want to bring you the five theological tasks of life. These will un-stick you if you are stuck. They will remind you of God’s voice speaking uniquely to you. These are the five theological challenges we all face. The death and resurrection of Jesus puts a face upon them.

During this Easter, set aside some time to:

1. Make an objective review of your life.

Have you reviewed the pictures, class notes, awards and souvenirs?

How did you get them, and where will they fit into your review?

Every high and every low are part of your proud story.

Enjoy your story.

2. Make the move from independence to inter-dependence.

Who taught you the greatest lessons? We know someday we will move into greater dependence than independence. Still this movement from thinking that “I am the self-made person,” to “I am part of a community of people who care for each

other,” belongs on the lists of our spiritual milestones. Inter-dependence is giving up some portion of yourself for the good of those you care about. It’s mission; it’s charity; it’s going the extra mile.

3. Owning your own wisdom.

I know people who say that they are the way they are because of family, ethnicity, handicap, tragedy, or neighborhood. That works for a while, but eventually we have to say that I am who I am because that is the way I have chosen to be.

What a great day it will be when we become a good representation of ourselves, rather than a poor imitation of someone else. We hear what “someone” says, or what “they” think. That doesn’t really matter much at the end of the day. What matters is what you can do to improve the world.

Owning our wisdom means that we are the way we are only because that is the way we have synthesized the lessons from our teachers and antagonists.

4. Pursue reconciliation.

Life is negotiation, and negotiation is politics. In life there will be triumphs, but also confrontations. Pursue reconciliation. Our news is filled with tales of warriors and casualties, just as the Greeks measured the success of life in terms of battle. But the spiritual person has other measures. Principal among them is the spiritual gift of reconciliation. We are not only our brother’s keeper, but also our sister’s neighborhood. Reconciliation is a daily task. Is there someone with whom you need to reconcile? Be first to offer the ungloved hand at Easter.

5. Achieve peace about our own death.

This world will go on without you. Easter is a testament to the man who was at peace with his life and his death. We need not hasten the day, but it gives urgency to each moment.

These notes are from Robert Buxbaum's book, *Aging Well: A Theological Perspective*.

What is the alternative to growing into tomorrow? "*If you don't know where you are going, then any road will get you there.*" -- Lewis Carroll

Don't make decisions based upon your fears, but make them based upon your hopes.

God wants to bless you with spiritual health.

TANGIBLE MEDICAL FINDINGS

Let me summarize the medical findings about the way that spiritual health can add years to your life:

- People who regularly attend religious services have lower rates of illness than do the infrequent.
- People who report a religious affiliation have lower rates of heart disease, cancer, and high blood pressure.
- Older adults who participate in private and congregational religious activities have fewer symptoms, less disability, and lower rates of depression, anxiety and dementia.
- Actively religious people live longer, on average, than the non religious.

(Credit: Dr. Gwen Wagstrom Hallaas, The Alban Institute.)

SO, IN THE SEASON AHEAD...

- I want to challenge you to pray more frequently.
- To read the scriptures more often.
- To discuss religious topics more frequently with friends and family.
- To attend worship more frequently.

- To identify the special talents you have and use them to help the less fortunate through your church or through justice and social welfare.
- To pray before you make major decisions, and to listen for God's answers, not just a repetition of your own.
- And to act consistently with your religious principles while reaching out to others of different faiths, different cultures, and different economic conditions.

This is the most important sermon that I can give this season.

And if you will grow into tomorrow by responding to the challenges I have just given you, you will live longer, you will be happier, and every day of your life will be healthier than without them.

God wants to bless you with spiritual health.

And spiritual health has real and tangible benefits that will enrich your life.



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