

Today we are reading again from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

Eventually,

Paul will be talking about love.

Patient,

kind,

and all the rest.

But today,

Paul is talking about the end of the world.

It seems a strange thing to our ears,

almost cult-like.

“from now on,

let even those who have wives

be as though they had none,

and those who mourn

as though they were not mourning,

and those who rejoice

as though they were not.”

And on and on....

“For the present form of this world is passing away.”

That was the expectation:

the world is ending,

so why on earth

would we keep going about business as usual?

To our ears,
we hear threatening words,
calling us to give up not only our vices,
but also our virtues.
We hear something maniacal
in words about giving up wives
and ending our mourning
and giving up our dealings with the world.

Paul IS hard to deal with,
but I don't think he's maniacal!

I think he's asking us to consider a difficult truth.

The funny thing is
that this truth is so much better
than the lies we tell ourselves.

And yet we often cling to the lies,
and run from the truth.

The truth is that the world is always passing away.
We lie and tell ourselves that we can stop it.

The truth is that God is eternal.
We lie and tell ourselves that God might just run out on us.

The truth is so much better than the lie.
Why do we run from the truth?

It's a kind of idolatry I think:
pretending that what is of minimal importance
is actually of ultimate importance.
Or sacrilege,
pretending that what matters most
doesn't matter much at all.

The trick, for us,
is not to confuse one for the other.

Don't confuse the endlessly changing world,
the endlessly passing away forms of things
with the death of what is eternal.

And don't try to make eternal
what really needs to pass away.

But we do.
We certainly do.

We get attached to this thing or that thing
and we hope that it lives forever,
especially if it is something we have worked hard on,
something that has mattered to us.

And when this thing or that thing fails to live forever,
as everything fails to do,
we can be seduced into thinking it is the end,
for us
or even for God.

We can certainly be seduced into thinking it is the end
BETWEEN us and God.

But it's not.
There is never an end between us and God.

I could be talking about our Kindergarten right now.
And on some level I am.
I could be talking about our politics right now,
whatever of the 28 different sides there seem to be at the moment.
And on some level I am.

I am talking about every form of human endeavor.
All our work
- the world itself.

Paul tell us
that all of it
is always passing away.

All of it,
is always passing away.

We can hear that one of two ways.
It's either good news.
Or it's bad news.

Bad news says that all is lost,
that what matters most is dying
and cannot be made new.

Bad news says that we failed,
that God laid a path for us
and we just couldn't follow it.

God doesn't send us bad news.
God sends us Gospel.
God sends Good News.

Our gospel reading today says it this way:

After John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee,
proclaiming the good news of God, and saying
"The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God has come near;
repent,
and believe in the good news."

John, prophet of God, arrested.
Jesus, son of God, "believe in the good news."

All of it,
everything,
is always passing away.

Good news says that things come and things go,
but God is with us always.
Good news says that we try and we fail
and God raises us up to try again.
Good news says that God is always finding new ways
to call us into partnership.

Good news says that sometimes,
what passes away is actually
the thing
that was keeping us from listening to God in the first place.

All of it,
is always passing away.

Good news
or bad news.

Those seem to be our options.
But we often choose to hear it as bad news!

Why?

I wonder if we'd rather be in control
than to preach the gospel.
And I don't mean pulling the strings
or anything vile or movie villain-esque.

No, I just mean
that we'd rather FEEL in control of our lives
than hear the gospel.

It's hard to feel in any sort of control
when everything,
all of it,
is always passing away.

There's no control in that situation.
There is only faithfulness.

There is no control,
there is only listening for the voice of God.

Not the voice that sounded like God yesterday,
not presuming to know the voice of God tomorrow,
or even this afternoon.

But the voice of God,
right at this very moment.

I could be talking about our Kindergarten.
And on some level I am.

I could be talking about our politics
or your family life
or my own.
And on some level,
I am talking about all of those things.

Because if we are just listening,
not controlling,
but listening,
for the voice of God
...right. this. very. moment,
that could make all the difference.

We might come alongside God
and catch him at work in the world,

and we might get to point
and shout
and say,

“That’s YOU.
THERE YOU ARE!
I’ve been looking all over for you!”

And we might just hear the voice of God say,

“Yes.

And that is you.

There YOU are.

I have been right alongside you,
every step of the way.”