

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, our minds are always looking forward. We are a people who look for the future with anticipation at some times, fear at other times, and also uncertainty if the future we will experience will take away what we treasure. Change can be a welcome thing and a fearful thing, everlasting God. But you are a God of change and growth. You walk with us in the darkness of our lives when we need you the most, and in the happy times, when we take you for granted the most often.

We remember some of the last words of Jesus today, Holy God, and his promises to the disciples and all who follow him. Although he left us bodily, his promises carry on in the companionship and leading of the Spirit. Help us, gracious one, to understand what it means to “keep your word” in our very hearts. Allow us to live in hope, so that our eyes and ears are peeled to what is “Coming Soon,” but not at the expense of making a difference in the here and now, for your Gospel is a living Gospel, not a distant reality. Help us to look forward faithfully while attending to the needs of here and now. Guide us to the life-giving future of the Spirit. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus the Christ, who was and is and is to come, the one who taught us to pray together...

SERMON

One of my favorite past times is watching movies. I love to take them apart, study what is in them, and find the implicit messages in the camera angles, the visual media, and the way things are presented. For instance, did you know that when you see several vertical lines in a shot, it means being trapped? If you saw the movie The Matrix, the symbol for the Matrix is lines of vertical code, which is trapping many people. To see diagonal lines in a shot means chaos. To see each of two people in a discussion in two

different shots means they are disagreeing. To look up at someone in a shot shows they have the power, and so forth. Film, to me, is not just about telling a story; it's an art form. Even though it's fun for me to go back and watch a film time and time again, there is something great about looking forward to the next one. The next movie on my radar is Star Trek: Into Darkness, which is set to come out on the day before our wedding. In a way, that's one of the greatest joys of the movie buff, to see what the next story is. You can see it everywhere when it comes to movies; there are always advertisements that announce the next film with the same lingo: "Coming Soon." We're always looking forward to what is coming soon in our lives, whether that be movies, TV, or any latest product. Good or bad, we are taught to be seeking for the next big thing.

In the same way, it seems like the faithful Christian life is always looking forward. It is, with some special considerations. We are a people tied to our history, but not always focused on the past as the golden age. We are meant to honor our history while incorporating it constructively into the future. None of these things should come at the expense of being attentive to the current moment. Our head is not in the clouds and separate from the here and now, but we do abide in hope. Hope is one of the greatest qualities of the Christian. We hope and work for the better things, justice for all, praise of Christ, equality among our brothers and sisters.

In worship, after we celebrate the Holiday of Easter, we are left with the rest of the season of Easter. For one thing, this means returning to a more joyful set of hymns after Lent's solemn nature. It can get really dull singing sad hymns. In another way, we recognize the ongoing ministry of Christ throughout Easter. Christ has returned from the dead, but he's not necessarily unpacking his bags for a long stay. He's only here for a short

while. We're looking forward to what happens next, after he ascends into heaven. The whole story is not over, but this chapter is nearing an end. Christ may be absent in body, but the ministry continues, which means big things are on the horizon. Because of this, we look forward to the next big thing: the coming of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost doesn't get a lot of love in the Christian understanding, but it is critical to the ongoing life of the church. It was the opening for so many to come into the fellowship of the church. It is where a free radical came into the faith and continues to provide us with direction and focus for the future. While this speech comes right before the trial and death of Jesus, it is for our ears now. We are at a point of departure in the Christian year, shifting toward a new dynamic in our faith. Let's take a look at what this change means, for us and for our connection to our Lord. We must recognize this is "coming soon," but not at the expense of who we are and what we do.

This passage from John is from what we call Jesus' "Farewell Discourse." This occurs right before he is taken prisoner by the Romans and executed. Jesus is giving his disciples final instructions, thoughts, and an understanding of the shape of things to come. It is undoubtedly future-focused. So much of what he says is reassurance that there is a future, even after his sacrifice. While the point at that time may have been reassurance, as we look at it now, post-resurrection, we see direction and instruction for the time when Jesus is no longer with us. Jesus is going away for now. He speaks of the ascension. Will anything change in our faith? Jesus' answer is yes and no. Jesus will no longer be with us bodily, but his message will continue. Jesus' relationship with us will remain, but it will be in a different state. The vehicle for this change is the Spirit.

As we recently discussed a few weeks ago, the Spirit has many ways of interacting with us. It has a way of pushing us toward God's calling, whether we want to go there or not. It is a comforter in our times of great need, but it is also a leader. Think of it as the director of an orchestra. It works alongside us, nudging us toward Christ's calling, but it does not take control of us. It essentially is the one who waves the baton at the orchestra of the church, directing the church toward the faithful way of ministering. Christ calls it the Advocate, the one who speaks on his behalf. We don't simply receive the Spirit when we call ourselves Christians, for the Spirit is not just only a benevolent companion. The Spirit's gonna move and it's gonna push sometimes, but that's always for our benefit, even when it doesn't feel like it at the time.

The Spirit works in tandem with Jesus, not as a substitute. His instructions here are not a simple pass-off to the Spirit. It's not the handing of the baton and a good-bye. Jesus says, quite clearly. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Jesus is not well wishing us peace; he is giving us peace. Although he is not bodily present anymore, he is not separated from us and from our situation. We are called to "keep his word" in a very real way, for the peace comes with God in three parts living among us, and God will dwell most fully with those who seek to be in communion with God. They will follow the word of Christ, let it dwell richly in their hearts, and love Christ's flock, for he gave his life for the flock.

This is a wonderful thing that Christ speaks of, but there is a possible hazard here. It has more to do with us than it does with the message of the text. The subtle danger is exclusive to our time. All of these things are wonderful things, but we should look forward to them in due course. Jesus is not explaining what is to come to his disciples so they may

look forward; it is that they may hope in the midst of darkness. With our different eye in a different time, we do have hope in the midst of the darkness, but, in a way, we have seen this movie before. We know how it ends. Consequently, we can get ahead of ourselves.

One fear I have about the Christian life is that it looks either too much forward or too much backward for its own good. One movie that is particularly interesting is the Adam Sandler movie "Click." It tells the story of a man named Michael Newman who often uses his job as an excuse to get his family everything they could ever want at the expense of spending time with his family. He one day goes to a Bed Bath and Beyond and buys a remote control he discovers works for his life. He is able to skip the unfortunate and unpleasant parts of his life, only to find that using the remote keeps his mind going ahead of his body. He's missing so much of his life, and his relationships suffer. Later, the remote starts working without him using, and he's consistently skipping forward in time, missing so much in the meantime. His health has collapsed in the meantime, and he's on the edge of death, only to wake up in the Bed Bath and Beyond to realize...it may have been a dream. Needless to say, this helps him get his life and priorities in order.

While that may be an overstatement for our lives, we realize how it hits us hard when we want to enjoy life the most. The holidays are a blessed time when we do so much work before and during that day that when we reach the end of Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, or your birthday, you realize you spent it in the details instead of the event. I think as a general rule, our culture is so future focused that we forget the present. Our minds live in the future, and the present gets lost. Our faith of the present gets lost when we are looking toward a distant horizon. This is the season of Easter, and while it's coming to a close, it reminds us that we have the time and space to appreciate what the next season

means: the Holy Spirit comes to revolutionize the faith. This requires we be in the present to hear fully what the Spirit is speaking to us this moment, this day, this season of our faith.

The end of Easter is approaching. This Thursday marks the end of the Easter season when we recognize Ascension day, the traditional day we recognize Christ's ascension into heaven. Like the "Coming Soon" posters in a theatre, there is something big coming, and it's not as simple as Star Trek: Into Darkness. This is when Christianity shifts from the presence of the bodily Christ to the Body of Christ in the church. The dynamics of our faith change. We should not look it as a bad thing, for Christ calls us to rejoice. He is returning to the Creator, and we are not left alone. We are not left without direction or purpose. The gospel continues, the message continues in the form of the Advocate. The key is that we do not let the future or the past overwhelm our celebration of the now. If we do, we will realize that our faith passes us by when we look for the next big thing. Thanks be to God for these gifts and the gift of the now. Amen and Amen.