

Pastor Roy's Sermon from Nov. 15, 2015

What impresses you? What impresses your neighbor?

The temple impressed Jesus' disciples. It looked so strong, so important.

What impresses our generation? Tall buildings? Long bridges? Large boats? Movies with computer generated, lifelike special effects? Cell phones and tablets that network with whomever, wherever, whenever you want? Information is at our fingertips.

When I was in school, field trips would sometimes include stopping by a really good library so students could get research sources which weren't available in our county. English papers had to be typed with all the right margins, centering page numbers and titles, with the dreaded footnotes and bibliography. Centering a title is now as simple as moving a mouse and clicking and the software assures your spacing and punctuation is right.

Yes, we are impressed by convenient information. A wide variety of music and entertainment is also at our fingertips online. We can learn what we want about history, people, science, books, places around the world. Of course, not everything we read is accurate, so we have to be careful about our sources. Every source has assumptions which can be checked based on references. Of course, even fact checking agencies have various values of what is true and good.

We are also impressed by our ability to understand the physical world around us. Evidence suggests that the universe has been expanding for 13 billion years. Earth revolves around the Sun which is about 5 billion years old. There are as many as 200 billion stars in our galaxy. The sun is among the brightest of those stars. The Milky Way is about 100,000 light years in diameter or 600 quadrillion miles wide (a 6 with 17 zeroes behind it—a long walk indeed). [6 trillion miles = miles light travels in one year] Furthermore, it is one of 125 billion galaxies in the universe. I learned something interesting this week. Among the sizes and ages of stars, one variety is the white dwarf. These are very dense: they contain the matter of the sun but are the size of the earth. Very dense. Their faint light comes from stored heat radiating out—like embers from a fire. They are old stars. But the universe hasn't existed long enough for the complete life cycle of those stars. Some think that white dwarfs will eventually turn into black dwarfs, as they lose their heat and end up as a large dense rock with no heat left. That takes trillions of years. In case you are wondering, the sun is a yellow dwarf, will become a red giant and ultimately a white then black dwarf. Clearly time is on our side.

So in what do you place your ultimate trust. That is, in what do you place your trust right now. Our fears reveal our trust. What do you fear?

The disciples trusted big buildings. They feared war. They feared being led astray. They feared earthquakes and famines. Jesus assures them that all of this is just the beginning, that there is much, much more to come. They need not fear because time is on their side. Time is on God's side. There are no surprises or final disappointments in the reign of God.

Jesus willingly gives up his life for the cause of love, he demonstrates how much he trusts in God's Reign. He demonstrates that the goal is not to live long or impress the masses, but to live well and entrust his life to God. To live well is to live in love, and mercy, and rest. To trust.

What do we fear today? What trust calls to us beyond mercy, love, and union with God and all of creation?

Do we fear being lost? Being left behind? Being no longer valued? Unable to contribute? Like a dark burned out star?

Let us have courage to look to God alone for our final hope and meaning. Let us entrust ourselves, as did Jesus Christ, to the God who gives us life and meaning. With such trust we learn freedom and hope. If we learn to so trust, nothing can separate us from the peace of God. Nothing.

With this trust we can courageously live and serve our neighbors. Again, the example of Jesus is the example of a man who lovingly poured out his life for those around him.

So let us love in our trust. Let us set aside all fear. We are in the hands of a God who will care for us. Ultimately there is nothing beyond mercy. Hope reigns at the right hand of God. Practice courage. Love your neighbor. Love all of creation. Yes, there are terrors around us as in Syria, and Paris and elsewhere. These and other challenges to our comforts exist. But our hope does not lie in comfort but in the promise of God that we are one in Christ with one another in the Reign of God. No exceptions. Ever.

In the words of Hebrews, "let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." This day of which Hebrews speaks is the day in which we must answer, "In what and whom do I place my trust?"

Let us spend time with God as we relate to ourselves, to our neighbor, and all of creation, so that we might know the answer and rest in that faith. Thanks be to God who holds us without fail. Amen.