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"THE TROUBLE WITH WAITING FOR TOMORROW"

"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you
do not know what a day may bring forth."

Proverbs 27:1

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If you were asked to list the most important qualities which Jesus had, which ones would you choose to head the list? If you were trying to describe the nature of our Lord and trying to tell someone of his most significant contribution to the human streams of things, what attribute would you name first? In trying to catch the essential difference between him and the rest of us -- his excellent mastery of it all, and the sorry mess you and I usually make of things, what one quality stands out in your mind?

Some of you would say the love he had for all the people that he met, the way he cared for them and not for himself at all. The way he cared enough to give up all he had to try to help them through their struggles. Some of you would say his love. And some would say obedience. Obedience, as the Scripture says, even to death -- to the death on a cross. And on the Sunday after Easter it is likely that we would be remembering still the agony he suffered in that Garden prayer, through tears of blood: "Not my will, but Thine be done". Obedience to his God and the discipline to carry out the demands which were made upon him to that which made his life worth living and worthwhile. You would do well to name obedience.

Some others would shout "his courage". And one week after Easter we can still recall the most courageous way he faced it all without wavering and without flinching.

The coward dies a thousand deaths before his time;
The valiant never tastes of death but once.

He stared it all into the eyes and stared it down. A man who was going on a destination that had chosen him, and in all the weariness and tortuous struggles of it all, he never lost his courage.

Some others would whisper "his holiness" -- in prayer and meditation. That, first of all, was the source of his strength and his song. He withdrew away from time to time and knelt in solitude to try to fathom all that God had done and still would do. He thought about his life before he lived it. Without his holiness he would have been just another gifted man of time, but that mark of God was on him, from his first day to the last. His holiness.

Or what other quality would you choose: his power as a healer of the sick; his great moral teaching - the way he taught us how to live? This morning we are going to set the focus on still another of the salient ways to face this life. The sermon topic tells you all about it. Christ never waited for tomorrow. He lived each day as if it was to be his last. Today is the important day. The trouble with waiting for tomorrow is quite simple: sombre, grave, but simple. The trouble with waiting for tomorrow is that tomorrow might not come.

There was a time when most Christians signed any letter which pertained to a future appointment with D.V., initials for Deo Volente, in the will of God, God willing. That must have been the kind of thing which Jesus always had in mind. And that surely was the writer's thought with his bold reminder in our text at the beginning of Proverbs 27. "Boast not about tomorrow, for you know not what a day may bring forth". It was true with him, the writer of proverbs. There in the rugged wilds of ancient civilization where life was often cheap; where plagues and famine and misfortunes we will never see again cartwheeled haphazardly through those mountain villages. And it was true in Jesus day; often where tomorrow brought a new cross, first for him and then to the others one by one -- crosses or the arena or the sword or some prison cell. They all knew its truth.

And it is true, of course, for you and me as well. Boast not about tomorrow for you know not what tomorrow may bring forth. True in the daily tune we hum -- tomorrow I'll do this or that tomorrow. I'll get around to it tomorrow. One of these days -- perhaps tomorrow, I'm going to change my ways a bit. I'm going to catch up on my lost friends and aging relatives. One of these days, perhaps tomorrow, I'm going to spend more time with my family. One of these days, perhaps tomorrow, I'm going to do more for my church. I'm going to start working for the things I believe in. One of these days ... We'll solve our social problems tomorrow, it takes time to change a mind.

There is, of course, a social setting to this text, although we are really speaking of it today for our personal lives. There is a kind of impatience that is entirely justified in our society. The "just-wait-a-while-and-see" kind of philosophy which has been characteristic of the way we do things will be replaced. The church at one time used to teach that God made the poor to be poor, and that to want more than poverty was not Christian. We are a far way from that now. The way we do things, the rate at which we anticipate improvement, and the reluctance to grant a kind of freedom now, all will have to change. That is how it might read if we were preaching on the social importance of "today".

But we are more especially noting the individual setting of the text. This past week, one of our Deacons who had advance notice (or should I say warning) of the sermon this morning sent me a marvelous bit of insight -- a poem from his own desk. It read:

He was going to be all that a mortal could be - tomorrow
Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write, tomorrow.
The greatest of workers, this man would have been, tomorrow.
But the fact is that he died, and he faded from view;
And all that he left when his lifetime was through,
Was a mountain of things he'd intended to do - tomorrow.

The Psalmist said it for us: "This is the day which the Lord had made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it". This is the day, not yesterday; for with all of the memories of what yesterday was, it is not yesterday to which God calls us. It is today. How many people do you know who live too much of their lives in the past, who pine for it the way it was - but can no longer be? This is the day - today, the here and now.

Dr. Speakman used to have a favorite story about the man who went to a life-long friend of the family to borrow a rather large sum of money on a personal loan. His friend just sat and stared as an expressionless face seemed to be saying "No, sorry about that". Then the answer came slowly, "I don't think I can do it, for our friendship has not been close enough lately to justify so large a trust". And our hero said, "But, Tom, our families have been friends for years. They have always helped each other. When we were at school I used to help you with your algebra. A-A-And, if you remember rightly, I helped to get you started in business. How can you forget all that?" Tom replied, "Oh, I haven't forgotten about any of that, but what bothers me is, what have you done for me lately?" What have you done for me lately? There are a couple of ways to take that, but let's pick only the one which says: each day is new, what you were yesterday is no longer important; what faith and service you used to have is fine, but what about now.

"Today is the day I have been looking for. All of my life has been spent in its preparation. Yesterday and tomorrow

are far away nothings. The one is a faint memory, the other a vague promise. But this is my day. It offers all that God has to give and I am a laggard or a coward if I fail to make the most of it."

This is the day which the Lord hath made. Too many try to live in the past; but others try to live in the future. Out of eternity a new day is born each morning and into eternity each night it will return.

There is a quite illuminating verse back in the 16th Chapter of Exodus: the scene is the desert country called so aptly in Exodus 'The Wilderness of Sin', east of Elim and just west of Mt. Sinai, and the band of runaway slaves led by Moses are there about to starve to death, already having forgotten the tortures of Egypt, crabbing to Moses on how stupid it was to start this voyage anyway. There were, the Bible says, murmurings all over the camp. It was hot and scary, but mainly they were hungry and so the manna came, that strange bread fruit of the desert; and they were all filled to the full. God gave the manna, but there is a funny thing about manna which we discover in the chapter - manna doesn't keep, at least it couldn't keep in the desert sun, so reads verse 21, "They gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating (need)". Yesterday's manna wouldn't keep, and if you weren't up to crawling out of the tent and gathering in the supply for this particular day, there was no manna you could fall back on in store.

Do you get it? Take that tasty little sermonic morsel and make your own little sermonette out of it. Everything they needed to survive was there, given as a gift, free as the air itself; but they had to go out and gather it up each morning in the trust that it would always be there. So God says: "Talk to me about now. I already know about yesterday, and I know more than you do about tomorrow -- infinitely more. So what are you doing today?"

A past President of Brown University took a group of students once to Europe on a twenty-one day tour. He observed them for a few days and wrote home: "They are caught, I think, in the hands of preparation. In England they were preparing for Holland, and in Holland they were preparing for Germany, and in Germany they were studying French so they could speak in France." The whole trip they were so busy preparing they forgot to enjoy it all while they were there, their eyes were always fastened on what comes next.

There is an old jibe they used to give to the students at the Seminary. A sharp jibe it is, too. They used to mention it just after one of the students had preached what he thought was the last thing in sermonic genius; and the jibe went: "You are only as good as next week's sermon." You are only as good as you are there. That means all of us who preach and those we preach to. Our safety lies in the daily renewal of our determination. The flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying. That's Christ's way of saying, "Let today's own worry be sufficient for the day." Or Proverbs - boast not about tomorrow.

But watch the emphasis. We have to plan, we have to act on the past. But the proverbs say "boast not" -- that's the difference. Or James: "Come you who say tomorrow we will go into such a town and spend a year there -- whereas you do not know about tomorrow." How many of us can understand the pathos of the poor suffering soul who told me several years ago: "We had planned a marvelous future. We were going to live in one of those grand and lovely houses on the Eastern shore. It looks now like we will never have it." And, aye, they didn't. We all get fastened to what we can someday do and see.

Whatever else is unpredictable in this world, one thing is sure, Christ practiced what he preached. He played the game with absolute honesty. There was no need to second guess; and we can squirm with that one embarrassed do-gooder who came and said to Christ, "I want to be with you", and Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Or just before that, in the clearest most unmistakable language of all, he was telling them about their lives and the wrong anxieties they allowed to drive them on: "Look at the birds and the lilies, why do you worry about what to wear or eat, seek first His kingdom". Then it comes for good. So, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let today's own worry be sufficient for today.

And James, the brother of Jesus, is great indeed. In the words which Mr. Newman read this morning: "Come now, you who say tomorrow we will go into such a town and spend a year there... whereas you do not know about tomorrow! What is your life? (We are reading the Scripture) For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." As it is, you boast in arrogance, we can live as if tomorrow were assured, as, aye, we can and do; but no eyes can see around the corner.

I missed something grand last Sunday morning, Easter. It wasn't until a meeting Friday evening that I caught up to what last Sunday could have been. I was discouraged by the snow and slush and roads. Then I heard on Friday that one kind and valiant soul was talking to her Church School students last Sunday morning and she said, "Look out and see the snow! You know what might have happened. The earth was all dirty yesterday with the rain and mud, and last night God had an idea. I think He said let's have some snow and cover everything up and make it new and white and soft again." And to those Kindergarteners she said, "That's what the Easter story is all about, too. God saw what a sorry place it was: this life and this death, so he sent the Christ, who one day made it new and white and soft again."

That was the snow on Easter.

That's the sun this morning.

That's the day, today.