



November 11, 2007

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Luke 20: 27-38

“Endings and Beginnings”

Today I want to reflect with you, as the sermon title indicates, on endings and beginnings. We have all experienced both, and will continue to do so. Many come to our minds as we look back over our lives.

I remember moving when I was six years old, from a house and neighborhood where I had been very happy. I played outside in all seasons, feeling the hot sidewalk burn my bare feet in summer, feeling my legs sting with cold as I walked to school on winter mornings in the required skirts of my era. I walked to the market to buy penny candy and popsicles with my friends. I shared secrets and comics with my best friends, the twins, Becky and Bertie. I even shared my fears and hurt with them, discovering that even at their tender years, they could hug and console me. That was a painful ending. It took time for me to adjust to my new house and neighborhood, but I did. Soon I began another life with wonderful moments and a new close friend.

A significant ending and beginning—but that of course WAS just the beginning of many more such transitions: Turning thirteen and sensing I had left carefree childhood behind in some profound way; Beginning high school; my wedding day; bringing the first baby home from the hospital; driving that grown up baby to college; dancing at that grown up baby’s wedding; leading that same grown up baby and her husband through a renewal of their wedding vows on their tenth wedding anniversary. Endings and beginnings.

Some endings happen and we don’t realize it at the time. When I went off to college, I didn’t know as I boarded the plane how many things would be different from that point on. The realization came later, and the ending became real for me.

Sometimes new beginnings can only take off in all their potential richness once the endings behind have been worked through, understood and claimed in some way. We NEED to END in order to BEGIN.

This reflection on endings and beginnings can help prepare us for the theme of today's worship and Scripture. We are approaching an ending in the cycle of our worship life. The end of the church year comes at the end of November. The new church year begins with the first Sunday of Advent, which falls on Dec. 2 this year. Our worship and readings reflect the sense of closing that comes with the end of our liturgical year. Today's readings have what is called an "eschatological" flavor. Eschatology, in Christian terminology, is the study of "last" or "final" things, like death, resurrection, judgment, the end of the age, time, or the world as we know it. This is a time in the seasons of the church, to consider ultimate endings.

Our Gospel reading today clearly acknowledges an end that is unavoidable for all of us: DEATH, which brings life as we presently experience it to an end. Jesus makes it clear that the promise of ETERNAL LIFE does not mean we don't DIE. He states that life DOES end, and the new life that begins is not like this one in every respect. Marriage and human relationships as we know and experience them will not be the same.

It's difficult to imagine that life to come. I leave it in the mist of mystery, and in the hands of our loving God. But I do believe it's imperative that we hear Jesus' message here: Life as we know it WILL one day end, even though we are assured of a new beginning to follow. This is a powerful teaching reminding us of the ultimate ending and beginning that lie ahead for us all.

Ours is a death-denying society. We can use our Christian faith to perpetuate that attitude. But that's not faithful to our faith! The Bible proclaims the truth, that unless a seed falls into the ground and dies as a seed, no new beginning as a sprout, then a plant, then a bearer of fruit can follow.

This is a vital truth for our lives. If we ignore the ending of THIS life, we will not be ready for the beginning of the NEXT. When we ignore death, we operate out of a fantasy that we have FOREVER to do and experience things still undone. When we face the REALITY that this life has a limit, we are moved to examine our priorities, to discover what is really important.

You may remember the quote from Clarence Stoughton, "Stewardship is everything you do after you say, 'I believe.'" This has been the focus of our stewardship emphasis this year. If we believe in Jesus Christ, in his saving love

and promise of resurrection; if we believe that Christ calls us to be agents of his transforming grace in this world, **WE WILL LIVE DIFFERENTLY.**

When we face our mortality, we are helped to recognize our need for Christ. We need to know there will be an end to this life, my friends. We do not have forever to do Christ's work. We do not have forever to uphold our church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service, as we promised in our membership vows. We do not have forever to say what needs to be said. We do not have forever to do what needs to be done. Christ calls us **TODAY** to honor, love, serve and obey him. He says, "Begin **TODAY.**" And he yearns for us to **WANT** to pray, be present, give and serve. He yearns for us to **WANT** to support what he is doing through the ministries of Baker. He yearns for us to find joy in the process. Christ is not honored when we support the church out of duty simply because the church **NEEDS** us to.

You have been invited to make a commitment to supporting the ministry of Christ through this church in 2008. A letter has been mailed with separate commitment cards for children, adults and youth. On that card you are asked to specify exactly **HOW** you will support the church:

How often will you **PRAY** for the church?

How many Sundays will you attend worship in 2008?

How much money will you return to God through your giving in 2008?

How will you serve Christ and your neighbors through Baker church?

This is a lot to grapple with—but God will help us do that. Our financial realities are presented in the mailing with the commitment cards. The Finance and Stewardship committee will be at tables to answer questions and provide handouts every Sunday in November. They have chosen to be completely honest and transparent about the financial situation of our church. A new member of that team, Lisa Bova, has graciously agreed to share a brief word about her experience as we began discussing the church's finances.

(Words from Lisa here)

Today is Veteran's Day. When I think about those who sacrificed precious **years of their lives** to protect our nation, to uphold our values of freedom, justice and mercy, I am humbled and grateful. Some of them gave the ultimate sacrifice of their very lives. We have been given the gift of **our years** of life—years in which we can serve Christ and love our neighbors. If we just fritter away our lives, never taking seriously the importance of each day, each moment, we have disregarded and wasted the gift of their sacrifice.

Take some time now to meditate and pray. Imagine how you would use your time if you knew you had only twenty-four hours left in this world. What would you do? Where would you go? Who might you want to be with? When would you want to be alone? Reflect in God's presence, and jot down any notes you care to. (Allow time). These notes are yours to keep or do with as you wish. If you'd like to share your insights with someone, do that. If you want to keep your musing private, do so. You may want to continue in reflection and prayer on this topic through the week to come.

Reflection on the ending of life can be painful to us. There is much that is unutterably sweet to me in this life. I hate the thought of it ending. But I do find hope in God's promise of a new life, a new age, a new resurrection body. We don't look ahead to a dim future, but to life and God's love. Yet I pray God will help us all to savor the moments of this life. Let's not waste the gift of each day, of each moment. Holy Spirit, breathe through us as we cherish and live THIS day-beginning NOW. Amen.