

IT'S NOT HOW OLD YOU GET; IT'S HOW YOU GET OLD

Jeremiah 17:5-8 This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. "But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.

They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

1 Corinthians 15::35-44a, 50-58 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual bodyI declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Luke 6:17-26 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power

was coming from him and healing them all. Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

MESSAGE:

God three bible lessons today have the same message: whoever bases his hopes on what this world has to offer is cursed because this world is destined for destruction. But whoever invests his hopes in the eternal treasures God has to offer is blessed—in this life and in the next one because the treasures that God offers surpass what this world has to offer as far as the heavens are higher than the earth. Paul writes: "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" In Jesus' words: "do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust devour and thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not devour and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is—there will be your heart."

The skeptic says, "ridiculous! Why wait for pie in the sky when you die when you can enjoy the garden of earthly delights that are laid out before you right now! Seize the day! "gather ye rosebuds while ye may; old time is a-flying!" Make music and love and laughter while you can—after all, you only go around once!

It's a tempting proposal. The invitation to satisfy our appetites while we can, and let tomorrow take care of itself, is an appealing thought. Our senses all rise up and shout approval! There's just one thing wrong with it: the garden of earthly delights can't keep us happy for very long because our ability to enjoy them doesn't last. We grow older and our senses grow older along with us. Our taste buds atrophy. We lose our sense of smell. **We can't hear each other!** Our joints freeze up. The grasshopper begins to drag his leg, as Solomon delicately put it. All of a sudden we realize that our garden of earthly delights has been taken over by young people who can still enjoy the pleasures it offers. Meanwhile we're left with confused memories of the past and anxiety about the future and we wonder where the time has gone.

That's what's wrong with the "seize the day" philosophy: we can't seize the day when we haven't got much left to seize it with! The bible has a name for the "seize the day" strategy of living: it calls it "idolatry."

We become idolaters when we seek lasting pleasure in created things rather than in the **creator** of all things. As Luther said, your God at any particular moment is whoever or whatever you trust the most to keep you safe and make you happy. If that's not God, it's an idol. If you look primarily to things in this world to keep you safe and make you happy—things like money or stature or power or pleasures of the flesh—you're an idolater. And

by that definition, I suggest to you that if we're really honest with ourselves, most of us are more idolater than believer.

Take me, for example. When I was twenty, I didn't worry too much about "safe" but I gave a lot of thought to "happy." I wasn't a believer so there was no thought of trusting God for anything. I trusted in my charm and my wits to get what I wanted and to get me out of trouble when I got into it—which was frequently. My idol was my marvelous self.

By the time I was forty, a few bloody noses had taught me that my wits and charm couldn't always keep me out of trouble, so in a worldly sense I had learned to straighten up and fly right—for the most part. But on a day-to-day basis I was still focused on "me-stuff": my next promotion, a bigger office, a fatter paycheck. I figured those were the things that would keep me safe and happy. My idol had become success, the American dream.

When sixty rolled around, I had become gracious enough to allow my family to join my group of idols. I figured that my job, my IRA and a few insurance policies would keep me and my family safe and happy. Financial security had become my idol. Now I'm pushing eighty and I'm trusting vitamin supplements and Metamucil to keep me safe and happy. Digestive tranquility and painlessness are my new idols. So for four decades I've been a believer and for three of them a pastor, and I'm still drawn to idols. And I suspect I have a fair amount of company.

As believers we base our hope for salvation on Jesus Christ, but I suggest to you that on a day-to-day basis, we're practicing pagans. Deep down inside we have faith, of course, but a large part of us still clings to idols. And how much faith do we really have? Well, Jesus said that it only takes faith the size of a mustard seed to move mountains, and I don't see anyone moving mountains, so it must be a lot less than that. So there you have it: we're practicing pagans with a percent of a percent of a mustard seed's worth of faith. And my question, fellow pagans, is: what do we do about it? Well, first of all we thank God for the faith we do have because as little as it is, it's enough to save us.

On several occasions, Jesus addressed his disciples as "ye of little faith," but he also promised them: "do not fear little flock for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." Paul said, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead—then you are saved." And no matter how tiny that spark of faith in you is, God will never allow it to die. "a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." And that, my friends, is good news.

And here is more good news: that glowing ember of faith deep down inside you? ***That is the real you!*** The rest of you is mortal flesh that is perishing even as we speak. But I wouldn't worry about it: as Luther joked, it's only a bag of worms hanging around your neck and one day you won't need it. In fact, you'll be glad to be rid of it. Anyway, what's so bad about losing your sense of smell? There are more things out there that stink than smell good. And what's so bad about not being able to see as well as you used to? It may have been fun to look into the mirror when you were twenty, but it's not much fun to see what's looking back at you when you're eighty.

In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, Yenta the matchmaker goes to Golde, whose daughter has become eligible for marriage, and informs her that she has matched her daughter to Avrim the butcher. Golde says in astonishment, "Avrim the butcher? He can barely see, he's almost blind!" But Yenta says, "let's face it Golde: is your daughter so much to look at? The way he sees and the way she looks—it's a perfect match!"

And as far as mobility is concerned where do you want to go anyway--and what are you going to do when you get there? Like the old geezer who was stooping down to pick up something he had dropped said to himself: "is there anything else I can do while I'm down here?" Try to think of it this way: every mark of aging—every new wrinkle, every age spot, every mole, every new unwelcome hair that grows on the outside of your nose--they're just love letters God is sending you to remind you that he is allowing your sins to mortify your flesh so that the real you can rise up out of the wreckage, inherit a new body and rejoice for all eternity.

In Paul's words: "though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." So the next time you look in the mirror and behold what has become of you—(first thing in the morning before a shower is a real good time)—instead of cursing the law of gravity thank the Lord of Hosts. And remember, that's the "you" you had so much faith in forty or fifty years ago, when you were young and you had the world on a string. You were invincible. And then—time happened.

I'll never forget my 50th high school reunion. One of our old high school teachers showed up. The last time I had seen him was on the day I had graduated from high school. He'd been in his prime then, but now he was he was stooped and old and bewildered. He looked like he had been hit with a giant stick. We'd kind of gotten to know each other in detention hall after school, but now he didn't even know who I was. Of course in another ten years I'll look like him and when you see me coming you'll think the same things about me that I thought when I saw him. But it won't matter, because ***what you see won't be the real me!***

The real me you won't be able to see will be in that glowing ember of faith that God will be keeping alive down deep inside me. I probably won't be able to hold on to much of anything else, but with that ember of faith I'll still be able to hold onto my Lord and Savior because God has promised me that, "a bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." Like a small child holding on to the string of a kite with his tiny fist as the wind pulls him along, I'll be holding on to Jesus with my tiny ember of faith and letting him pull me along. And then one day he'll give the string an extra special tug, and I'll fly away!

AMEN.