

Diversity ~ May 22, 2011**John 14:1-14; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16**

Well, I see we are here this morning following a prediction of the end of the world. Those who believed the world would end last evening at 6 p.m. Pacific time, and who cleaned out their savings accounts, gave away all they had, and maxed out their credit cards, hoping they would never have to pay them off, are discovering what it is like to start all over again. Others, who wisely gave no heed to this latest prediction, are just rolling along with life the way it has been. While we might have joked a bit about it, many kept an eye on the clock and quietly observed the passing of the hour.

The man who made the prediction, Harold Camping, has not been seen. His daughter says he is “bewildered.” His two predictions, one in September 1994 and one for yesterday have missed the mark.

This type of prediction is not new. I well recall years ago when a group of people camped out on the highest point in Wisconsin and awaited the end of the world. They, too, had given up all they had to follow their guru.

Of course, there will be other attempts to predict when our world will come to a grinding halt or simply explode or implode. All this proves, in the long run, is that we just don’t know if or when our world, as we know it, will no longer exist.

Our scripture reading for this morning, one full of comfort and challenge, reminds us, that, in God’s house there are many dwelling places. It tells us that there is a place for you and for me and for Harold Camping no matter what our take on Christianity might be. It tells us that, as Christians, our way into the kingdom is through faith in Christ. We might vary in our interpretation of this, but the door remains open to us.

Years ago, a young woman, who was a bit of a fundamentalist, used to tell her family, and me, that there would be no room for any of us in the life that was to come. We would simply sizzle up somehow and be gone. Even though she was a Biblical literalist, she neglected to ponder any scriptures that might be inclusive and that would celebrate the diversity of belief under the umbrella of Christianity. She far preferred to dwell on those readings that were exclusive and that supported her narrow viewpoint of things. If we did not agree we were doomed.

When I would point to this particular reading from John, she would pause a bit. I would say, “Karen, there is a place for you and a place for me—they are not the same room. “ Both of us were glad about this.

We all tend to follow our own mindset about things in life without managing to change much, because we all like to be right. We prefer to cling to events and readings that give us comfort as we struggle with life. We tend to shut people out who do not see things the way we do and we forget the little poem by Edwin Markham that shows us the true way of our faith.

His words are:

He drew a circle that shut me out,

Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.

But love and I had the wit to win,

We drew a circle that took him in.

Sometimes it takes a lot out of us to draw an inclusive circle because it does not feel safe to us. We feel vulnerable. It is a risky business to return love for contempt, but we are called to do so by our faith. We are called to consider that, in our diverse way of looking at things and of interpreting the scriptures, lies our strength. If we all agree with one another we become comfortable and settled in, right where we are and there are no new challenges for us. In a way, it is always good to have a worthy adversary. Not someone who simply attacks us, but someone who prods us forward into new arenas of thought and discovery. Jesus was the catalyst for those early followers and the words we continue to read and study about him continue to move us forward.

Our faith requires that we grow and change, when necessary, to become the very best humans we can become. In our reading for this morning we are told that we will do deeds “greater than those” Jesus did. This is because God dwells within each of us and, at our very best, we are reflections of that presence. Some of us are more in tune with walking the walk and talking the talk than others.

The good news is that we all are able to decide that we will become more Christ-like in the way we live and move and have our being. We have time. We do not know when our own end or that of the world will come about. We have the precious present to make all things new again no matter where we might be on our faith journey. We have time to celebrate our differences while looking for what it is that unites us and moves us forward as a small part of the body of Christ. We have time to understand that there is room for each of us in God’s kingdom, and that we need to live and let live those with whom we do not agree.

So, the next time we feel we have the inner track to God, we need to back off a bit, suspend our judgment and consider the many rooms there are in God’s kingdom. Room enough for Harold and Karen and you and even me.

-- Amen