

Spotlight on the early church: This world is not our home!
2 Corinthians 5:1-14
A sermon preached at Plymouth Presbyterian Church,
St. Helens, Oregon on June 23, 2024
By Rev. Peter J. Blank H.R.

It was Art Linkletter who told us that children say the darndest things. It was certainly true in Ralph and Laurie's home. You see Laurie and her husband, Ralph, have a little ritual they go through with their kids when one of their pet goldfish dies. The whole family gathers in the bathroom and around the commode. Anthony, the 3-year-old, holds the "deceased" while his sister says a little prayer. Then Anthony drops the fish in the bowl and Lexy, the 5-year-old, flushes it to heaven.

One day, during one of these rituals, Lexy asked her dad if her Grandpa who passed away a few years ago, was also in heaven. When Ralph said, "Yes," the 3-year-old asked, "Who flushed him?" (The Reader's Digest)

Children are amazing in what they learn at home.

Where is your home?

Some thoughts on home and home life, Paul Dickson captured some of the difficulties of parenting in his little volume, THE OFFICIAL RULES AT HOME. Among others he discusses these three immutable Laws--Laws which he says are corollaries of Murphy's famous Law: "If anything can go wrong, it will. If anything can't go wrong, it will anyway."

- The first rule at home is: "Whenever there is a flat surface, someone will find something to put on it."
- The second : "A body at rest tends to watch television."
- The third he calls simply Parent's Law: "By the time you're right, you're dead." (Walker and Company)

Many of us can relate to these three laws, particularly to the last one.

Where is your home? That is the question that grows out of our lesson from the Epistle. Where is your home? St. Paul is very eloquent in his contention that this world is not our home. Paul's audience in Corinth were struggling with this idea.

OUR HOME, PAUL REMINDS US, IS WITH GOD.

We are a pilgrim people. From birth until death we are simply passing through this world. Nothing is permanent. Nothing remains the way it was. Watching our children grow up reminds us of that, doesn't it? We would like to capture magic moments in the lives of our children and hold on to them, but life is a moving stream. That is the value of photographs, Kodak moments reminded us time and time again. They let us hold on to the past a little longer. But even before the print is dry the experience is gone. Nothing stands still.

If we could interview those of you who are the older members of this congregation, you would voice one refrain, I suspect: How quickly the years have flown.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE TIME WE HAVE

Since life is passing by so quickly hadn't we better focus on the things that really matter?

American poet Nicki Giovanni wrote an essay titled, "The Time Machine." It is about a comic book she read as a child. The story is based in the twenty-first century. One evening a man walks into a doctor's office and is waiting to be seen. No one is there, but there is a card at a table beside a machine. The sign reads, "Fill out the card and insert it into the machine." The man completes the card and follows the instructions. The machine begins rumbling and humming, and after a few seconds prints out a response which says, "You will be struck by lightning and killed tomorrow morning." The man looks up at the machine and notices a button which reads, "Death Averted." He pushes the button and the machine begins gestating again. This time it prints out another card. "You will survive the lightning strike, but three years from now your business will fail, and you will commit suicide." The man decides to push the "Death Averted" button again and the machine repeats the cycle. This time the printout reads, "You will

survive the business failure, but you and your family will be killed while traveling to a vacation site."

The man becomes obsessed with the machine. He continues to play late into the night pushing the "Death Averted" button over and over. He ignores the wind blowing through the windows and the clouds gathering in the sky. He misses the thunder as it begins to rumble in the distance. And at two minutes after midnight, he's killed by lightning while pushing the "Death Averted" button. (*The Executive Speechwriter Newsletter*) He had become so obsessed with the game that he blocked out what was happening around him.

Have you ever looked up one day and said to yourself, "Can it possibly be December already? It seems like Christmas was just a few weeks ago." Or "can this possibly be her sixth birthday already?" Life dribbles, dribbles away. Have you become so obsessed with meeting your responsibilities that you have ignored the most important tasks God has given you?

Writer Tim Kimmel has six individually framed pictures across the upper shelf of his roll-top desk at work. The picture on the left is of the Jameson Memorial Hospital in New Castle, Pennsylvania. That's where he was born. The picture on the right is of a six-foot-high granite monument that stands in the middle of the Graceland Cemetery just outside of this same town. You can't miss the word "Kimmel" carved on its side. The earth beneath it conceals the remains of several generations of his family. The four pictures that sit between these two outer pictures are of Darcy (his wife) and Karis, Cody, and Shiloh, his three children.

"What we do for a living has a way of absorbing our attention," Kimmel writes. "Its demands are so great and its ego satisfaction so intoxicating that it can easily become the focus of our lives. I love my work, but I don't want it to become the heart of my existence my reason for living. That's why I have those pictures strategically placed on my desk. When I look up from my studies, I come eye level with a reminder of my purpose. Stealing a peek at them several times a day has a way of keeping my work (and my life) in proper perspective. In the brief moment it takes me to scan them I receive a message in the cluttered back rooms of my brain.

"The pictures say, Don't forget, Tim, THIS is where you checked in (the hospital), THIS is where you're checking out (the cemetery), and THESE FOUR PEOPLE in the middle are WHY YOU ARE HERE." (Tim Kimmel, *LITTLE HOUSE ON THE FREEWAY* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1987), p. 168)

This world is not our home. Our time here is so brief. It is so important that we don't miss what is really important. We need to make every moment count. But there is a second thing that this idea that the world is not our home should impress on us:

LIFE IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS.

You can't tell it by the way most of us spend our time, but life isn't about cars and houses and boats and health club memberships and all the things we spend our hard earned money on. All these things are here for a moment and then they are gone. Only one thing in the world is eternal and that is people. That is where we need to put our attention: people. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

C. R. Snyder, in his book, *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HOPE*, tells about an interesting and revealing phenomenon that he witnessed on two separate airplane trips. First, there was Jenny and her mom. Snyder judged Jenny to be about thirty months old. She was taking her first airplane ride. Mom described the loud engine noises at takeoff to Jenny, and how they would be pushed back in their seats. "And, I'll hold your hand," said Mom. Jenny and Mom were both excited and chattered away through the entire flight. Mom enjoyed how Jenny experienced things for the first time. She even took Jenny for a walk around the plane, all the while answering her questions or pointing out things. Jenny got scared when the landing gear went down, but her mom comforted her with a big hug and an explanation as to what was going on. Jenny and her mom were clearly connected and trusted each other.

At the other extreme, says Snyder, consider the interactions of Teddy (age three) and his mom. Mom put Teddy in the seat next to hers, fastened his seat belt, and said, "Now, just sit there and be quiet. Mummy is going to sleep" (which she did). Teddy was obedient, but his big eyes and trembling little hands revealed his fear at several points in the flight. Mom was oblivious, however, to what was happening in Teddy's mind. If there were things he wanted, one would never know because he sat quietly throughout the entire flight. No words or touches were exchanged. Teddy did not share whatever thoughts he had about things he wanted to do or learn. In many ways, he was flying alone. (Bob Barnes, *15 MINUTES ALONE WITH GOD FOR MEN* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House

Publishers, 1995), pp. 89-90)

Doesn't that example make you wonder how many children are flying alone through life? How important it is for parents to understand that no matter how many advantages you give your child, the most important advantage is your undivided attention.

This world is not our home. Time is rapidly getting away from us. The meaning of life is relationships.

And one thing more: **OUR MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP IS THE ONE WE HAVE WITH GOD.**

St. Paul says the purpose of our lives, whether in this world or the next, is to please God. The primary relationship we are to build is with God. We are establishing bonds with one another and with God that are not just for this world but for a world beyond this one as well. How do we do that? By living in the moment here and now. By looking to those things that are eternal and not wasting our time on those things that are temporal.

Fred Rogers, whose TV show for children has been watched for twenty-five years, gave the baccalaureate address at Boston University many years ago. He told the story about a lad who wrote to him. The boy told of his troubled childhood, and severe abuse. The lad would sneak into the living room, against his parents' orders, to watch "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood." The boy named Tony wrote Fred Rogers that he considered him his only friend. Tony was placed in a foster home and is writing a book. He sends parts of it to Mr. Rogers. Tony wrote of his foster parents: "My dad has shown me that if I take care of the present, I can take care of forever at the same time." ("Real Faith In A Real World," by Harold C. Perdue, THE CLERGY JOURNAL, May/June 1994, p. 81) That about sums it up, doesn't it? That's a good message to take with us on Father's Day. This world is not our home. We are only passing through. We need to make better use of our time. We need to improve our relationships with our family with our friends and with our God. "If I take care of the present, I can take care of forever at the same time."