

Sermon Text for May 21, 2017

By: Brett Foote

This World is Passing Away...

1st John 2:15-17

When I started praying through and preparing for this sermon, I realized that this will be the last time I have you all captive as a congregation. So naturally there were many things that I thought I could or should share with you. The most important thing that seems pertinent to share is that: I, because of your commitment to scholarship, discipleship, and ministry was afforded the ability to split my time between Princeton and Strasburg this past school year. I need to say “Thank you” from this pulpit because your willingness to serve me has been a sermon for me over these past few months. My first year of Seminary is over. Yes you can cheer. Some of you are aware and others not, that I was selected for a class and program at Princeton called “Farminary.” It is a small sustainable farm experiment in learning that was undertaken by a former PHD student turned professor. The class I took was called “Ecologies of Faith.” It’s purpose for us was to analyze how faith develops in a person through the lens of agriculture. It was taught in 6 hour blocks with 2 hours of practical labor in the fields (weeding, planting, harvesting, setting up greenhouses etc.) 2 hours of kinesthetic learning where we discuss our readings with one another while composting or walking and 2 hours of instruction over a potluck. Two or three weeks into that class we visited a church and farm in Conoete, North Carolina. There we met a man named Rev. Richard Joiner I’ll let him share a bit about himself: Play video...

We had the opportunity to serve on the farm and learn from them. Show picture of me painting.

What stuck with me most from that experience wasn't the practical service, the fact that we went to the first legally chartered black town in America, or the radical hospitality that was shown to us down there. It was in fact Rev. Joiners story of how he was called. Rev. Joiner had performed over 30 funerals in one year related to nutrition and dietary health for people between the ages of 32 and 40 within his congregation when it hit him. A congregant came to him after the last funeral and he looked them in the eyes and told them: "It's all going to be ok." On his way home from the funeral he pulled over on the side of the road and began to sob and yell. He said out loud and I quote "I keep telling these people that it's going to be alright, that's a terrible lie, that's a "well I can't repeat what he said" lie." In that moment he knew God was calling him to do something utterly ridiculous in terms of his life. God was telling him to start farming. He grew up as a sharecropper..an institutionalized form of racism and slavery at one point. He had some not great memories from the not to distant past. He wanted no part of this plan. And so despite his church almost firing him 6 times, and it not gaining traction at first, and having to start the farm with the children's ministry, he knew that is what the Lord was calling him to. He starts it and within a short period of time the local Hospital reports a sustained drop of 54% in Emergency room visits and nutritional related "issues." The local Highschool sees a 56% increase in graduation rate and job/college success...

This isn't about their farm or their success though both are important. Let's look at our Scripture. Our New Testament reading comes from the book of 1st John this can be found on page # 239 in your Pew Bible in the New Testament in the pews in front of you : Listen closely for the Word of God.

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Prayer: May the words of my mouth be Your Words, may our thoughts be inspired by You, and may we all glorify You in their doing. Amen

We find this text positioned halfway through the book of 1st John, which, many commentators believe is actually a sermon to the believers in Ephesus. The sermon is a reaction to a church community who had a group of people leave them, who were “denying Christ’s identity and/or Divinity”

The author calls the people Anti-christ’s and other names. I know what you are thinking and no, unfortunately I will not be calling anyone the “Anti-Christ” this morning... as much as you want to call out the Dallas Cowboy following in this congregation we won’t take that time this morning.

These 3 verses in particular are juxtaposing two differing ways of living in the world: The first being the ways in which those who love the world and the things in the world live and the second being “those who do the will of God.”

Let’s discuss the first way of living: “Those who love the world and the things in the World.” Knowing the greek word for world here illuminates the text richly.

The word here is *kosmos* and according to New Testament Greek Scholar’s, the word *kosmos* here means earthly joys, possessions, cares, sufferings...etc. So as a congregation, if we are trying to follow this sermon, we are to not love earthly joys, possessions, cares, or sufferings.

I'm going to break down and explain each of these as some are quite confusing.

Don't love the "earthly joys" of the world as the world does.

The author is saying "don't love the things that bring you joy only here on this earth." These things are fleeting. Instead, I say, seek after a joy that will only be realized in heaven.

Don't love the "possessions" of the world as the world does. The author is saying "don't love the things in the world." A quote by Charles Spurgeon I read this past week from one of Laura's favorite blogs "Becoming Minimalist." sums up my feelings exactly: "You say, 'If I had a little more, I should be very satisfied.' You make a mistake. If you are not content with what you have, you would not be satisfied if it were doubled." Don't love possessions. Instead, I say, find satisfaction in sharing, serving, and giving.

Don't love the "cares" of this world as the world does. So many things to-do. Let me see hands raised... How many of you have to-do lists. I believe to-do lists are extremely useful (Laura can attest to that), but they can be deadly as well. If "to do" is our focus... If busyness is the norm... if our lives are consumed with the next task,...then we are loving the cares of this world. Instead, I say, look for ways in which you can "be" with God through the day. Anyone, who asks me what I do to connect with God and sabbath knows that I love grocery shopping, cooking, and getting my hair cut. These aren't chores, or to-do's, these are times where I feel rested...and connected with God. Pay attention to those things in your lives.

Finally, do not love the "sufferings" of this world as the world does. I think we can all agree we don't love suffering... I personally do not...I don't believe many people do. So maybe this needs a bit of clarification... What the author is trying to say is: Don't focus on the sufferings here on this earth as if they have the final

say. Instead, I say, look at the sufferings as temporary pieces of life. They are very real, but they don't get the final word.

All of these things mentioned are temporal things they will all end.

Let's look at verse 16 discusses all of the things that are in the world: "for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world."

All three of these things are described in Scripture as Idols. No, not those idols... Ones like this that was found in Exodus 32.

Anything that can be found on this earth can be turned into an idol even good things. Money, sex, food, marriage, education, ministry, success, jobs, house, car. You name it, it can become an idol.

Summarizing the first way of living: The first way of living thinks as the world thinks and creates idols .

Let's look at the second way of living: The second way of living is described as doing "the will of God."

Now you ask "what is the will of God?"

My favorite theologian & preacher happens to be a man named Henri Nouwen. Henri Nouwen was a Catholic priest from the Netherlands who held teaching positions at: Notre Dame, Harvard, and Yale until he met a man named Adam who happened to be affected by a severe Intellectual handicap. Adam changed Nouwen's life. Nouwen left his teaching position at Harvard and joined a community dedicated to caring for and doing life with individuals affected by intellectual and/or physical disabilities. Nouwen says that those individuals did not care about his success or his doctoral degree's they cared only about the love they were shown and given. A man who drops a teaching gig at Harvard to care for

individuals affected by disability...I'm going to listen to that man when he talks about the will of God. So here is what he says about doing the will of God: Jesus cured people not by doing all sorts of complicated things. A power went out from him, and everyone was cured. He didn't say, "Let me talk to you for ten minutes, and maybe I can do something about this." Everyone who touched him was cured, because a power went out from his pure heart. He wanted one thing--to do the will of God. He was the completely obedient one, the one who was always listening to God. Out of this listening came an intimacy with God that radiated out to everyone Jesus saw and touched.

Ministry (Following the will of God) means you have to trust that. You have to trust that if you are the son and daughter of God, power will go out from you and that people will be healed.

"Go out and heal the sick. Walk on the snake. Call the dead to life." This is not small talk. Yet Jesus said, "Whatever I do, you can do too and even greater things." Jesus said precisely, "You are sent into the world just as I was sent into the world--to heal, to cure."

Trust in that healing power. Trust that if you are living as the beloved you will heal people whether or not you notice it. But... **you have to be faithful to that call.**" The call to do the will of God.

Back to the story of Rev. Joiner.

I understand that being a pastor and a farmer isn't so crazy or weird around here. Look at John Meck over at Strasburg Mennonite.

However, in the Presbyterian church you get called to the vocation of Teaching Elder. You go through, at minimum, 7 years of higher education, learn the original languages of the Bible, you take more than a few exams through the church, and fill out lot's of forms all to become a pastor. Then God calls you to farm...as a pastor.

This is the story of a person doing, as verse 17 says, "the will of God." it very much doesn't make sense to me if I put my self in his shoes. But, after seeing the results and the... "fruit" if you will, I know that this was God's will for him. I'm reminded of 1st Corinthians 1:25 which states : "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

Rev. Joiner & Nouwen are both beautiful examples of Proverbs 3:5 that was read earlier. This is a charge for all of us "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight."

I pray that we can all, myself included, do God's will and follow God's foolishness, realizing as the text says that this world and all of it's joys, possessions, and cares are all surely passing away.