

Home

Wayne Waibel – 08/07/2022

What Christ is trying to impart to His “little flock” of disciples is that they are not to be afraid. It is their Father’s good pleasure to give them the kingdom. They just have to recognize it when they see it. Hence the need to be ready (or not).

As we immerse ourselves in the Word of God, there are going to be certain passages that will not do its work among us if it does not startle and offend. Isaiah comes to mind with today’s lesson talking about Sodom and Gomorrah. Those two words inform specific, often disturbing emotions. And this can be a very effective reminder to us of a God who despises injustice.

We would do well to appreciate what our contemporaries in ancient Jerusalem could not fully comprehend for centuries. Simply that history is not left to the power of empire. History is in God’s hands. Personally, I’m quite relieved with that basic truth. We can kid ourselves all we want, but the fact remains that in the fullness of time, God prevails.

It’s difficult to look at the kinds of things the prophet Isaiah is talking about and wonder how God finds a way to put up with us at all. We are so bogged down with itsy bitsy rules that we can only faintly glimpse the eternal. It’s no wonder that the first and most furious critic of religion is God.

We just can't seem to grasp the concept that grace is given – freely. Not earned. What we do and how we live matters on so many levels. **How** we worship is of far less concern to God than the fact **that** we worship.

We've all attended worship in places that are clearly void of any real spiritual presence. They may have tons of religion, but no real tangible evidence of mercy. And worship that does not concern itself with justice is hollow indeed.

Then there's the matter of faith. The book of Hebrews reminds us that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. One might think faith to be very illusive and discretionary. It is neither. It is that still small voice that reminds us constantly of the best part of ourselves. We just have to overcome the clatter of postmodern civilization enough to allow it to enter our daily life and work. No small task that.

It's easy to confuse religion for a relationship with God. If you stay on the surface of things – just about anything can be rationalized. Once you start peeling away layers and getting down to that which matters most – it becomes a little less obvious.

This is why evil's favorite shelter is a house of worship.

I am of course speaking in universal terms. In this place, at this time, such is not the case. Because we are in our collective element, here. This, for us, is home.

We are ready to feed the hungry – house the homeless – comfort the hopeless – teach the inquisitive. This small congregation stands tall among houses of worship. We get that it's not about us, but our God and our neighbor.

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The story of Abraham is well known to us. The story of Abraham is common knowledge among all orthodox religions. We look upon it as the beginning of the chosen people of God, which includes us. But not a lot is said about his extraordinary faith. I'm not talking about his son Isaac, which was where we usually point as an example of complete trust in God.

What I find remarkable in Abraham's life was the fact that he wandered in the land of his inheritance as though he was a stranger in that land. The land which God promised to him and his heirs.

The original Bedouin – he lived in tents his entire life. A man whose offspring number greater than the stars in heaven above or grains of sand on the earth's beaches. Truly remarkable faith.

Abraham, like Jesus – never really found a place on earth he called home. He concerned himself with laying a foundation in heaven. That's faith. It's the way he chose to live his life.

Here was a man who embraced the notion that the meaning of life is not to be found in the accumulation of wealth, power, and privilege, but in loving God and neighbor.

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So what we have to ask ourselves is, do we want to live lives of taking or do we want to live lives of giving? I think I know what the prevailing answer around here is.

Maybe it's because we've seen a season or two, or perhaps our lives have just been so blessed that we're left with no discernable alternative. However we arrive at it – we're definitely on the righteous side of this one.

I claim no particular skill when it comes to predicting the future, but I do have some leanings with regard to today's Gospel lesson. It stems from Christ's assurance to His disciples that it is God's steadfast desire to give them the kingdom. This reminds me that His kingdom will indeed come. No question. I have no illusions about that.

The cool part is that the Son of Man is coming at an hour we do not expect. The unknown author that wrote the letter to the Hebrews did so because they were growing impatient. They thought they had waited long enough and that the 2nd coming of the Lord should have been at hand by now.

Every generation thinks theirs is the last. The world is at an end and the time is ripe for the second coming of Christ. It's probably as much wishful thinking as anything. There are plenty of ways to interpret the end times, and I've mentioned it before – the end began on the day Christ was crucified, but the fullness of time has not yet come.

I suspect that about the time the world stops waiting for Christ's return is when He will arrive. It makes perfect sense. That's why Jesus commands us to be ready. We do not know the hour of His coming. But we do know that it is at an hour we do not expect. Perhaps once the expectation has evaporated – the hour will have come. Wouldn't that be something? Amen.