

Herman

Wayne Waibel – 11/06/2022

It's too bad that the lectionary stops the gospel reading for today at verse thirty-eight. The two verses that trail... pack a nice punch. "Then some of the scribes answered and said, 'Teacher, You have spoken well.' But after that they dared not question Him anymore." If that's not a classic, "Here endeth the lesson," I don't know what is.

Regardless of your beliefs, death is pretty final. So much so that it is universally accepted as the end of life as we know it. But we are not God, and to God there is much beyond death. It's a tricky business to be sure, and with our limited imagination and capacity to understand, about all we can conclude is that while death is the end of many things, it is NOT the end of everything.

When Jesus tells us that, "God is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him," He is informing us and reminding us that eternal life is not simply the continuation of mortal life beyond death. It's something else entirely. What that something else is we cannot know, until our time has come.

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The Sadducees represent that segment of society that embraces rules and laws and regulations. There is a time and place for such things, but at this time in the gospel and at this point in Christ's ministry – they are woefully inept in their attempt to trick Jesus with those little rules. Whether it was to discredit or otherwise humiliate Him, or simply out of a misguided sense of duty – it resulted in, "they dared not question Him anymore."

All they really accomplish in their attempt is to solidify Christ's hold on the citizenry, and expose their own shortsighted understandings. The church cannot live on what was in the past.

Humanity's chief end in life is to glorify and enjoy God. And Jesus – in this sense – is no different than each of us. His role in this world is to justify the love of God for His people.

God is not sitting on some mountaintop passing judgment, but is deeply engaged in the lives of His followers. This God is a vivid life-giving force. He delights in the abundant joy of His people, and wants nothing more than their earnest praise. There are no truer words we can speak than the words of praise.

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The Thessalonians were struggling mightily with misconceptions and convenient doctrine, and it was perpetuating a collective mindset that rendered them confused at best – outright lost at worst. The author of this epistle was doing his best to steer that community of faith back toward a shared comprehension of what their reality was, knowing that could provide a clear vision of the days to come.

Gratitude and encouragement are the antidotes to fear based hysteria. From the multitudes that accompanied Christ on His drive to Jerusalem to the clustered gatherings of the newly forming Church of the Way as early Christians were known – there were copious amounts of both fear and hysteria. But our God is a God who makes a way where there is no way.

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Next Friday is Veteran’s Day. It’s not exactly a day of celebration, but it is an opportunity for us as a society to express our gratitude for a marginalized group, who – generally – did their best to seep into the fabric of that society unnoticed. To them it was a matter of moving on.

Since 9/11 – things have changed. I’d like to think there is a collective understanding of, and appreciation for, those who strap on their boots every morning and stand guard over our freedoms.

There are times when evil seems to hold far too much power. If we can hang on to the promise that its power is limited, that it will not have the final say, then we can continue the struggle. Our task is to keep on keeping on. And nowhere is that shoulder to the wheel mentality more prevalent than among our honored veterans.

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When I was a boy scout – my crowning achievement was earning the God and Country award. There were a lot of requirements to fulfill, but the endeavor I valued most highly was the year I spent assisting the church custodian in preparing the sanctuary for worship.

This was a huge church, so it took a lot of effort to maintain, to say nothing of special preparations for weddings and funerals and such. Herman and his wife Rose took care of our church all by themselves. I came along to “help”, and I followed direction well, but I found myself engaged in conversation with Herman a lot – and I don’t think he talked much to anybody else. He was a quiet man of dignity.

You wouldn't know it to look at him, but Herman embodied what Americans honorably refer to as the tip of the spear. He was among the first wave of American soldiers to storm the beaches of Normandy. A gentle man with a steely-eyed determination that enabled him to survive the brutality of war, and return home – take a wife and become the caretaker for a community of faith who largely knew nothing of his sacrifice.

To most of the congregation, he was the quiet guy who remained in the kitchen during worship and prepared refreshments for the fellowship following the service. About the only time he spoke was to return an occasional greeting from a passing member. That was his life from the time he returned from war – until the day he died.

And his story echoes through generations of this nation times the millions of souls that constitute that same willingness to serve a higher calling. To step out of their privilege and safeguard freedom. To preserve the core value that the movement of praise to God is the first and last word of our lives.

It's entirely fitting that this truth is made manifest in the life and times of His Son. We may emulate that praise, or we may wholly embody it. The bottom line is that it will be measured worthy in our book of life. Jesus saw to that. He continues to see to that. Amen.