

What you believe about the future determines your behavior in the present.

A mother sees sunshine in the morning but hears a forecast of rain in the afternoon and sends her child to school with a raincoat. One investor thinks the market is going up and buys; another thinks it's going down and sells.

A young man so angry after being expelled from school and all he can think about is revenge and goes on a murderous rampage.

From the mundane to the malicious: what we believe about the future determines our behavior in the present.

We're all familiar with our story from Genesis as Noah believed God about the rains and the flood, and he built the ark.

Now he steps out on dry land for the first time in over a month. I imagine him taking a deep, deep breath of fresh air after forty days and nights of birds and animals and family!

Frederick Buechner writes that “in one way...it gave Noah a nice warm feeling to see the rainbow up there, but in another way it gave him an uneasy twinge.

“(He thought that) if God needed the rainbow as a reminder...that could mean that if someday God didn't happen to look in the right direction, or had something else on his mind, he might forget his promise...”

Think about it this way. Some of us this morning are probably feeling OK about ourselves, our lives are not in turmoil, we feel like we have our future pretty much under control.

We have pretty much what we want. That's not necessarily a bad place to be, but this current situation may mask our true spiritual condition.

It is easy to trust in God when things are going our way. But what happens when the rains come, when our business dwindles, when our health fails?

Can we still trust God for our future without being excessively anxious, fearful, and controlling? Can we continue to be generous toward others without obsessing over our future and our problems? Might our ‘uneasy twinge’ about the future make us less open to the new creation God promises?

What you believe about the future determines your behavior in the present.

I read somewhere that in the ancient days; mapmakers did their best to draw maps of the known world. Some were surprisingly close to the mark.

But they all had one interesting habit in common: When they came to the limits of their knowledge about the world, they would write on the edge of their maps, “Beyond this, there be dragons!”

Beyond the outer limits of their world was pictured an end to the world, a place of great danger and death.

And not just death by known causes, but by dragons, creatures of myth and fable and legend, creatures that existed only in their fearful imagination.

What you believe about the future determines your behavior in the present.

If you read chapter 40 of Isaiah carefully, in the early verses it says, “*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly.*”

It sounds somewhat grim when he says that Jerusalem has received double for all her sins, but the point here is that it is over.

The whole chapter talks about the goodness and promise of God and how everyone is to hold on to

hope, their behavior in the present, to ‘wait for the Lord’, to believe the future because God’s promise is good.

And we should go ahead and start rejoicing now because as sure as the sun rises, as the rainbow appears in the sky, the good things of God are coming.

In the Old Testament, there is no neutral waiting. Waiting on the Lord, believing the future is either positive or negative.

If it is negative, it is fear. If it is positive, it is a hopeful faith, renewed strength ‘to mount up with wings like eagles, to run and not grow weary, to walk and not faint.’

I have come to believe more in a Promised Time for everybody than a Promised Land. After a far longer and even more arduous stormy journey, the seven billion of us and more who inhabit this planet are in fact on the very borders of that time Isaiah speaks about:

“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord and my right is disregarded by God.’”

This is the prophet’s way of saying that we often think God has forgotten us, God doesn’t see us, and God does not know what we are going through.

Then we have these great words of comfort:
“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He doesn’t faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless.”

But instead of ‘mounting up with wings like eagles’, God’s children once again are holding back. Instead of ‘renewing our strength’, we are losing our grip.

It is understandable. We have been through tough, disillusioning times. (Who was it who said, “I used to be an incurable optimist, but now I’m cured”?)

It’s that same ancient trait that keeps us in the familiar, in the known boundaries of our lives, in our comfort zone. There’s just something about it when we come to those fears, that ‘uneasy twinge’.

Remember those mapmakers and their dragons? Why didn’t they just say, “Beyond this is unknown”?

It would have been true and would have left open the possibility that something beyond the limits of their known world might prove to be favorable or beautiful or valuable.

Why did they assume the unknown future would be worse? Did it never occur to them that there might be limitless opportunities, open to any who would dare pass beyond those boundaries?

That is the question for what you believe about the future, possibilities of faith and hope and love. If we believe that, what do we do about it today?

Listen to how Mattie Stepanek in one of his poems answers that question:

*The next century, the next millennium
Is being made, now,
Today, each second....
Because we, today, are the history of tomorrow,
We must ask ourselves each day
What we are doing that may have
An influence on the future.
It really won’t be for many years that
The future will indicate if something we said,
Or if something we did or did not do,
Had an impact on a single individual,
Or if it trickled out to touch the whole world.*

The title of this poem is “Momentous Reality” and that’s what this day is, your future is what you make it right now.

This leads one to wonder what hopeful faith, what believing the future might look like for 21st Century followers of God.

Believing the future is not merely the optimistic view that somehow everything will turn out all right in the end if everyone just does as we do.

Believing God's future is a more robust, a more powerful, view that even if things don't turn out all right and aren't all right, we move through and beyond the storms that disappoint or threaten to destroy us.

Waiting for the Lord means we expect and trust that God's future will be done on earth as it is in heaven, in our lives and in our church and in our community.

It's a choice to be made about the kind of life we are to live, what is important in that life, what takes priority.

Flesh and blood, remember, is what Jesus took upon himself. He came to us, touched us. This is important, this life.

His behavior at this table that night and in the days to come revealed the future he believed in.

We call it the bread of life and the cup of salvation, his life poured out for others and broken in rejection and disdain so that we would see all people as worthy of sacramental and sacrificial care.

Remember, Jesus washed the feet of and served even his betrayer. All who need his love are welcome.

Jesus believed in a future in which we would become bread for a hungry world, in which we would become drink for those who thirst, offering compassion for those on the margins of life, forgiveness for the fallen, and hope for the poor, the hungry, and the sick.

For Jesus, to wait on the Lord meant to suffer death on a cross and the rainbow became a resurrection.

We are called to believe the future of God's resurrection power even in the Calvary situations that surround us.

So we love in hope. We work in hope. We challenge our time and the kingdoms of this world with a hopeful faith.

Like Jesus at this table, we keep our eyes on the people who need us to move into their future and, like Noah, accept the bold challenges of building a better world.

This was the challenge accepted by our ancestors in the Reformation: To love God's creation and God's creatures, to make sacrifices, and travel down difficult roads:

Believing in a future that invests in people now, to believe in them beyond their current situation, teaching struggling children to become good students, young people to grow into good adults, support struggling neighborhoods to become healthy places for them to live and learn and work.

Believing in a future that leads us to invest our time, energy, and money to create a society to lift people instead of labeling them, that opens a path for the future instead of building barriers.

Believing in the future, we 'mount up with wings like eagles, run and not grow weary, walk and not faint', strength renewed to build a world without fear; a world, in effect, without borders; a world, at last, at one and at peace.

What we believe about the future determines our behavior in the present, so what are we doing to give people a future to believe in now?

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.