

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

January 21, 2018

The Rev. Peter C. Jacobson

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Wichita, Kansas

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the fall of 1979, when I was a senior in high school, we were required to take a class on American government. It was taught by Coach Settles — who was probably 20-25 years older than the students. I remember that Coach Settles always wore a sport coat and slacks with a shirt and tie. And his ties were positively *massive* — they were *very wide*. I remember that one day, he told us a story of back when he was in high school, the fashion was much different. When he and some friends were getting ready for their prom, they took a road trip to the big city, so that they could get the smallest, the skinniest, tie possible — they wanted to be the hippest, the coolest. Of course it wasn't so long after that — in the 80's — the fashion started changing back again — no longer were those wide ties in vogue. No. The fashion had swung back to skinny ties.

It is rather strange — funny — how fashions and fads come and go.

There was a time when a mobile flip-phone was on the cutting edge — and now it is hopelessly old and passe. Of course the day will surely come when your brand new iphone or ipad, will also be outmoded, and will end up on the trash heap. It is as St. Paul writes in today's Second Reading: "*the form of this world is passing away*" — or as even more poetically expressed in the King James Version — "*the fashion of this world passeth away.*"

Of course, St. Paul had something more in mind than tie sizes and cell-phones. They are surely included. But what Paul is saying is that this *whole world* — this cosmos — is a fashion, a fad, which is passing away.

Consider. The sun, the moon, the stars, the land, the oceans, our lives, our families, our jobs, our joys, our sorrows — everything — will someday be like old junk in a landfill. Except that the landfill itself is also passing away.

This isn't the kind of thing we like to dwell on. But deep in our hearts, we know it's true. You don't need the Bible to know that we're all going to die someday. And it's not only *we* who will die. Geologists tell us that even the mountains come and go. And physicists tell us that someday our sun is going to burn itself out — but only after it first incinerates our planet.

"*The fashion of this world passeth away.*" That truth could be downright depressing, even frightening. But it doesn't have to be. Not if we're in tune with our Lord Jesus, and with what he is bringing about.

Today's Gospel tells us that "*Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel'*" (Mk 1:14,15)

The form — the fashion — of *this* world may indeed be passing away. But

Jesus declares that a whole *new world* is coming. Out with the old, then, and in with the new! “*Repent and believe in the Gospel.*”

The new, coming world, is what our Lord Jesus calls the “kingdom of God.” And it is no mere fashion or fad. It will never pass away. This kingdom is made up of people of every nation, tribe, and race — all who hear Jesus’ call to repent and believe the good news, that a new world is coming.

“To repent” means to turn your back on the old world of sin and death, the old way of life. “To repent” is to turn *from* selfishness and pride, *toward* generosity and humility. “To repent” is to turn *from* worry and anxious thoughts about how today’s problems are going to be solved, *toward* simple trust in the Lord God who cares for you so much, that he numbers even the hairs of your head. “*Repent and believe in the gospel.*”

“To believe in the Gospel” is to lay hold of, it is to grab onto, the new world of God’s kingdom. “To believe in the Gospel” is to *trust* — to trust that, because Jesus died on the cross and is risen from the dead, nothing can separate you from his love. Nothing in the present or in the future. Not your sins or your failings. Not your doubts, or your difficulties. Nothing in this life, neither in death — not even the passing away of the entire universe — can separate you from God’s love for you in Christ Jesus. To believe in the Gospel is to know that, because you have Jesus — or better still, because *Jesus has you* — you have all that you need.

The form — the fashion — of this world is passing away. But Christ has died. Christ is risen. And Christ will come again.

Well, how then shall we live in this passing-away world, even as we’re waiting for the next one? St. Paul answers that question. He writes:

*From now on,
let those who have wives
live as though they had none,
and those who mourn
as though they were not mourning,
and those who rejoice
as though they were not rejoicing,
and those who buy
as though they had no goods,
and those who deal with the world
as though they had no dealings with it. (1 Cor 7:29b-31a)*

Hmmm. It sounds a bit strange. You might call it *living-as-though-not living*. But what does that mean? St. Paul says “those who have wives” should live “as though they had none.” But how do you do that without getting yourself into a lot of trouble?

St. Paul is *not* saying it’s okay for husbands to be unfaithful to their wives. No. Rather, Paul *is* saying that, since the form of this world is passing away, *don’t*

get too attached to it. If you get **too** attached to the things of this world, well, you might not be able to let go. And if you don't let go, you'll pass away with them — with all the other things that are passing away for good.

Again, we're all mortal. We're all going to die. We know that. "*The fashion of this world passeth away*" — and that includes **us**. If you're counting on the things of **this** world to save you — even the **best** things of this world — like a faithful and loving spouse — well, you're going to be disappointed. Because your wife can't save you. Your husband can't save you. Your children or your parents can't save you. Your job can't save you.

But, if you're counting on Christ Jesus and his promises to you, well he won't let you down — not even when you are "passing away."

Consider how Jesus died. Those around the cross heckled, and taunted him, shouting: "Come down from the cross and save yourself!" They wanted him to hang onto his life in this world, which was passing away. And as long as he was alive, well he **could have** saved himself. He could have come down from the cross. But he didn't do that. He remained faithfully obedient to the Father. He was obedient even unto death.

Christ Jesus did **not** rely on himself. He willingly let go of **this** life, and made himself totally and completely dependent on his Father. He lived-as-though-not-living, and so he died-as-though-not-dying. And in response to his complete and utter trust, God raised him from the dead.

Brothers and sisters, this is where living-as-though-not living leads. We do not count on the things of this world to save us. Instead, we rely solely on God. And, in giving everything up — what do you know! — we receive it all back again, and more! But in a whole new way!

No longer need we desperately **cling** to our possessions, our livelihood, our friends, our children, or even husbands or wives — as if our life depended on them. Instead we receive them **back again**, for what they were intended to be all along — **precious gifts from God**, entrusted to us. And because they are **gifts from God**, therefore treasures to be savored, and cherished, and loved.

Things come and go in this world — "*the fashion of this world passeth away.*" That's not going to change. But Jesus calls you to his kingdom — a kingdom which has no end.

Are you ready to let go of the old? To lay hold of the new? It's the sort of thing you have to do every day — again and again: "*Repent, and believe in the Gospel.*" But you can do it, because as St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians: "*You have died, and [now] your life is hid with Christ in God*" (3:3).

In the name of the Father, and of the ✝ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.