

Today will be yesterday tomorrow

Hebrews 13:1-8

September 1, 2013

Today will be yesterday tomorrow. Tomorrow today will be tomorrow. And yesterday tomorrow is today. You know what that means, don't you? I mean, don't you know what that means? Because I have no idea!

It means at least this: today is fleeting and elusive. Today quickly fades into yesterday, and tomorrow is so very soon today. Today is the only time we have. Today is the only time we are. But today is always, continually changing, which means that our lives are always, continually changing.

How do you like change?

I like change. I value creativity and freshness, not always doing the same things the same way. I like to challenge myself, to learn new skills, to ponder new ideas, to explore new places.

Every summer that Lynne and I return to Maine, we find delight in doing new things. This summer we hiked the West Quoddy Shore Trail along the cliffs of Quoddy Head just south of Lubec and then explored the town, the easternmost point in the United States. We "discovered" Markel's Bakehouse in Castine, a wonderful place to have breakfast sitting on an outdoor veranda overlooking the bay. And we saw a show, "The Spitfire Grill," at the Northport Music Theatre. We have driven by this nondescript pink building sitting just back from Route 1 many, many times over the years, but we never went inside, never saw a show. It was terrific!

We like new experiences. We like discovering new places. We like change. Except ... Except when one of our favorite stores, Harbor Farm, is put up for sale and scheduled to close. Except when a crabby man puts up "do not trespass" signs on the beach at Center Harbor, making it hard to hunt sea glass and pottery shards in the same places we have hunted them for years.

We like things to be the same, year after year after year! We want to be able to go back to our same favorite places, to do again all our same favorite things to do. And when we go to our favorite restaurants? We always order the same thing!

I tease our staff -- Teri and Greg and Miah and Wayne and Barbara. I tell them nobody is allowed to leave, at least until after I have left. Only I'm not teasing! I mean it!

Do you understand how blessed I am to work with such dedicated and talented and gracious people? Do you understand how blessed we are to have each of them working with us and for us? I want it to stay just like it is, just like this, forever. But it won't. It can't, because today is always changing. Our lives are always changing.

The same is true for me after an especially meaningful worship service. It is harder for me to get back to work after a service that leaves me on a spiritual high, than after a service that seems flat and uninspiring. When something doesn't work, it makes me want to work all the harder, to do what I can to make a better connection with you, to find ways to better connect the word to us and us to the word.

But when the service has been powerful and meaningful, when we have experienced together a palpable sense of the presence of God's Spirit, I go home filled with joy, but wanting somehow, some way, to hold on to what I cannot hold on to. Because, however Sunday goes, next week we start all over again.

That is true of any of the joys we experience. The joy is in the moment. We can't hold on to it. We can't go back to it. We can never experience it again. It happened. It was real. Nobody can take it away from us, ever, but we can never experience it again.

But we will experience joy again! We will, because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever! Jesus brought us joy yesterday. Jesus is bringing us joy today. And Jesus will bring us joy again tomorrow, because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

What does that mean?

I'll tell you what I think it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that Jesus is rigid, inert, not moving, not active, like a statue frozen in place, a timeless image of God's perfect human being. No, Jesus is alive, and alive is moving, doing, being, coming, going, loving, wanting.

But doesn't alive mean changing, too? Well, yes, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Who he is, how he loves, what he wants, does not change. He remains the same, forever.

The One who broke the power of sin and death yesterday, is the One who breaks the power of sin and death today and will again tomorrow.

The One who forgave without condition yesterday is the One who forgives today and will continue to forgive tomorrow.

The One who brought God's kingdom near yesterday, brings God's kingdom near today, and will tomorrow when God's kingdom comes.

And the things the Spirit of Jesus asks from us today are the very same things he asked from his followers yesterday and will ask tomorrow from our children and our children's children. You heard it this morning in the text from Hebrews. What Jesus asks of us is love and generosity, compassion and fidelity, clarity of mind and utter trust. None of us need wonder: "What does Jesus want from me today?" We know! Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Atop the list is trust, utter trust. "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" So don't be anxious. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He will not forget you or abandon you or leave you defenseless.

Don't be afraid. Jesus is with you, whatever the circumstance, whatever the threat.

And don't give up. Jesus did not give up, and won't give up on you.

And when you grieve -- when you grieve the absence of one you dearly loved, or grieve the loss that diminished strength or diminished opportunity or waning life bring you, or grieve the passing of an extraordinarily wonderful experience you will never have again -- when you grieve, be comforted because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He has not forgotten the one you loved. He has not forgotten you. And the joys he has yet to bring us far exceed anything we can imagine! The joys you have experienced yesterday and today are a sign, a promise, an appetizer of the joys still to come tomorrow from the One who is the same.

Next Sunday, we begin a new church year, and I must confess, it makes me anxious, because there is so much I want for us.

I want joy and discovery and closeness and transforming experiences for us in worship.

I want us to be dedicated and diligent and energized in our commitment to make a difference for our neighbors and for our world for Jesus' sake.

I want us to have enough money to pay our bills and pay our staff and invest boldly in mission.

I want us to be excited, eager, grateful, joyful about being church together, about being church here together.

So I am anxious ... because I think it depends on me, because I think it depends on our staff, because I think it depends on our church leaders, because I think it depends on you.

But it doesn't. It doesn't depend on us, we depend on him. We depend on Jesus. We change, which sometimes means gain and sometimes means loss, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So whatever happens this year -- whatever goals we accomplish, whatever goals we miss, whatever joys we share, whatever griefs we bear -- this is what matters, this is what we are here to do: to praise Jesus, all the time; to follow Jesus, all the time; to put ourselves, spirit and body, into Jesus' safekeeping, all the time.

Entrust yourself, entrust your family, entrust our church to him, and to him alone, because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!