

FROM HISTORY TO ETERNITY (Readings 1 cor. 15; Rev. 5; John 20) June 2010

"I am the resurrection and the life" says the Lord. "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die". John 11

Some might wonder what kind of comfort the bible readings read here today can possibly offer. They doubt and wonder because these writings are old. If you were to search the internet you might find scans of some of the oldest copies of these documents. 2nd and 3rd century. They are flaking with age, placed behind glass because in many cases the slightest touch some of them might crumble with dust or the oil from the human hand would cause them to disintegrate. Some might wonder how words written so long ago, thousands of years in some cases, could possibly "give sweet comfort" as we sing in one of our hymns.

I know that Edgar, struggled with us week by week as a faithful attendee kept coming back because he was learning with us that for the Christian, the Word isn't just some historic document but the Word written became flesh and dwells among us. The Word who became flesh, continues to offer his bodily presence in the Lord's Supper which Edgar partook of time after time. The Word lives to enter into human history where we are to take us into eternity. The Word incarnate is Jesus Christ the Lord. To those who wonder and to those who want to help those who wonder, I encourage you to take a journey from history to eternity. And in this eternity the believer finds comfort.

But the Bible begins with what sometimes seems to us just old words or history. St. Paul, even though he's from the New Testament is always on about history. He goes back to Adam in the first reading. It's a history of humanity falling into sin, suffering its consequences in sickness, suffering and ultimately death. It's a history of God's people travelling through the wilderness to the Promised Land. It's a history of God's people in that promised land building a temple, offering sacrifices seeking and searching for the one sacrifice which will put an end to all that sickness suffering and ultimately death. But then the Word becomes flesh in "fullness of time" at Bethlehem in Judea, entering into human history to proclaim the forgiveness of sins through his sacrifice and shedding of blood on the cross, death and three-day rest in a sealed tomb.

But then the emphasis of the Scriptures, as it applies to us, shifts from history to eternity. It shifts from this world to the next. That Messiah, Jesus Christ rises from the dead leaving the realm of history and confines of human time. He is eager to depart from this realm saying as recorded in our Gospel reading, to Mary Magdalene standing near the tomb of our Lord, "Stop holding onto me" for I have not yet ascended to the Father". Jesus is joyous of leaving the restrictions and confines of human time. Notice that he does not leave the body, rather ascends in that same body, not leaving the flesh but the restrictions of the flesh. One of the greatest restrictions of living in this flesh while dwelling on earth here below is the restrictions imposed by time. Time is really a task master both then as now to enter the eternal present which is eternity.

But Jesus breaks the bounds not only of death but also time by rising from the dead. He ascends into eternal heavens. And God's Word is very clear on the relevance of that fact for us. The relevance for us is emphasized again and again in the prescribed funeral service. It is written on your bulletin covers "In Christ, all shall be made alive". It is based on Scripture. "Because I live you shall live also" Jesus promises us in John 14:19. "I am the **resurrection** and the **life**. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" John 11:25. And at the beginning of the service we took hope in the fact that "we who share in a death like his shall surely share in a resurrection like his".

And so by God's grace by virtue of our baptism, Edgar and the saints and all who believe, have the hope of rising as he did, in our bodies, from this temporal time bound place to eternity. It means as one of our hymns suggested, nothing ever gets old. From the hymn Amazing Grace we hear in verse 5:

*When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Then when we'd first begun.*

In the hope – this heavenly hope of eternal life, we can then easily see that the spiritual man can rightfully disparage of history. History and other learning is superceded by that which is much greater – eternity. In the light of eternity I too can disparage history. Here is something much better.

It is as the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 13:

*Whether there are prophecies, they will fail;
Whether there are tongues, they will cease,
Whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.
For we know in part and we prophesy in part.
But when that which is perfect has come, then
That which is part will be done away.*

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.
Now I know in part but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three but the greatest is love.

And the love of God is the summary description of heaven. He has wiped away every tear. He has comforted every wound. He has restored body and soul. He liberates from the tyranny of time and history.

Just this week, on Tuesday I was reading about how the tyranny of time is gripping us all the stronger.

- 35 per cent of teens ages 15-17 eat a daily meal with parents, down from 64 per cent in 1992.
- 12 per cent of Canadians' time is spent on leisure, down from 15 per cent in 1998.
- 2 million fewer people attend arts performances, down from 15 million in 2001.

Edgar, in his last days, experienced the tyranny of time. He was one of those people intuitively knew that his time on earth was growing short. Last night, our congregational chairman Dave Rasmussen shared with us that Edgar also told him that he thought his time limited. Not much more time to see a sunset, to say goodbye to family and friends. Not much time to clean up loose ends. But now I assure you, Edgar no longer experiences the tyranny of time.

Some might say to themselves "Really"? Some might wonder. Will Edgar be left waiting an agonizing wait for Erika and all his grandchildren. Assuming that Kristin, Jessica and Tyler share their grandfather's Christian faith and baptism, he will see them again. And it will seem but a moment. For remember that for Edgar and all the saints, they are in a state without time. For them, it is but a moment, and it is "The Day of Resurrection" when we hear the trumpet of the Archangel and the Voice of the Lord calling all who have died up from the grave where they are instantaneous clothed with a new body, a spiritual body. And if we should still be alive on that Day of all days, we shall be caught up, transformed in a twinkling of an eye to receive our bodies and join the saints and be with the Lord forever.

What a glorious day! This is why Christians though they grieve, grieve not as the world, but with hope!

We move from history to eternity! The tyrant time is forever put away. Time is a tyrant in so many ways. The constraints of time separate us from our loved ones. Time also ages us and weakens us. We often speak of the ravishes of time. And Edgar could be no exception. He struggled on his cane. He struggled with stairs. But in eternity those constraints shall be no more. As he enters into heaven it seems instantaneously that the Day of Resurrection is upon him. He sees his loved ones in the faith. He feels his renewed body. He no longer just feels energy in the heart. He experiences vigor in his step.

So will some still wonder at the comfort given in these ancient writings? Maybe they aren't so ancient after all. Their origins are in heaven which is timeless. The true Word is incarnate. The true Word is Jesus who rose from the dead. This Word comes from the eternal realm and lead us back there. To this, all history leads, first to the promise of a Messiah to the realization of the Messiah, to his resurrection, to his ascension and ultimately to us as we follow.

Will you join Edgar and the saints in the pursuit of the Living Word? I think that Edgar, having perspective from eternity would be pleased with final question I put to you. The Eternal Word, as I mentioned previously breaks into human history. He enters at Bethlehem, but he

continues to enter at the Lord's Supper. May the Lord grant us all the grace to partake and continue to share in the eternal mysteries as Edgar did.

In the name of Jesus we pray and find comfort.

Amen.