

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Mark 13:24-32

The Jewish comedian Henny Youngman was particularly known for his doctor jokes. This is one of his best. “A doctor told a man he had six months to live; but the man couldn’t pay his bill. So the doctor gave him another six months.”

How long do you have to live? The truth is, none of us know. But when your final day comes it is unlikely that you can negotiate an extension.

That is why each year as Advent draws near the church puts before us images of the end of the world. They are frightening images: the sun will be darkened the stars will fall from the heavens.

Although these images are not comforting, it is important for us to consider them. They remind us that an end will come, an end of the world and more immediately and end to our own lives.

Why is it important for us to consider this? Not to frighten us, but to motivate us. Not to tell us how we should die, but rather to show us how to live. Life looks very different when you view it from the end. From that perspective it is much easier to recognize what is really important.

The truth is this: most of us spend an immense amount of time and energy on things that are truly insignificant. We worry and fret about things that will not make a difference one way or the other.

We give hours and sometimes days of our lives to matters that really do not amount to a hill of beans. A month ago, thousands of Americans camped out on sidewalks sleeping overnight so that they could be the first to buy the new iPhone. Now was that important? As they lie on their deathbeds will they say, “I’m so glad I did that!”

Millions of people in the world spend energy and time licking their wounds, nurturing their grudges against people who hurt them or ignored them last month or even twenty years ago.

When they stand before the King on the last day, will they look at that amount of time and the energy they spent with pride? Will they say, “I’m so glad I invested so much of my time in that resentment and anger.”

All of us get wrapped up in our agendas, in our schedules, in the things that we want to accomplish: making money, shopping at the mall, shaping our resumes.

When we take our last breath, will those things be significant? Will we say, “I’m so grateful that I spent all that time in the office.” Or, “I’m so happy that I was able to buy that coat at Belk’s.” Or, “I’m so lucky that I made more money than other people did.” Or, “What a wise decision it was for me to spend most of my free time in front of a television or computer screen.”

Are those the things that are going to give us satisfaction and peace when we take our last breath? I don’t think so.

This is what today’s gospel is about. It calls us to consider what questions are the important questions? **Not** what questions seem important today, but what questions will be important on the **last** day?

I believe that there are only three questions that will matter as we face eternity. All three questions are about love: Did I let love in? Did I give love away? Did I choose love even when it was difficult?

Did I let love in? Was I able to see the beauty of the world around me and the goodness of the people in it? Was I able to appreciate and respond to the people who loved me?

For all that is wrong in the world, was I able to find that ‘sweet spot’, that place where I knew that things were good; that place that allowed me to laugh, to be thankful, and to know that I was blessed.

And when I found that joy, did I savor it and celebrate it? Did I let love in? Did I give love away? Did I use the time and talents that were given to me to pass love on?

Can I identify a member of my family or even a stranger, who is better because of me? Is the world somehow wiser or healthier just because I was in it? Did I give love away?

Did I choose love even when it was difficult? Was I able to forgive someone who hurt me? Did I speak the truth even when I knew probably no one would listen? Did I honor the commitments which I made at work and at home?

Did I choose to side with the good, taking the risk to do something even though I knew it might not be successful? Did I choose to respect other people even when they didn’t deserve it? Did I work for peace even when revenge and violence were more tempting? These questions perhaps more than the others will be the ones which will give us peace and satisfaction on the last day. Did I choose love even when it was difficult?

We all spend so much of our time on things that are insignificant. But in the end there are only three questions we need to be able to answer positively: Did I let love in? Did I give love away? Did I choose love even when it was difficult? If we can answer positively to these three questions, we can close our eyes in peace and satisfaction. We can also have the confidence that we have found the door to eternity. That is why it is a foolish thing to postpone dealing with these questions until we reach our deathbed. That is why it is essential to begin answering and living these questions today.