



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon by Pastor Jami Anderson, Nov. 14, 2010

There was once a man who had aspired to and attained a fairly comfortable and satisfactory life. He was pleased with the way things had gone. The apartment he lived in was filled with carefully selected possessions. His car was one of his choosing. His job was interesting. All in all, life was good and he appreciated that fact. He was a man who enjoyed his habits and his sense of stability. One of his pleasures each day was to start the morning with a simple, satisfying ritual. When he rose from his bed, he would touch things in his bedroom and say to himself, "Mine." When he entered the kitchen to get some orange juice and a cup of coffee, he would touch things in the kitchen and say, "mine." He walked through the apartment and touched his paintings and his sculptures and his furniture and said, "mine." It always made him feel good. When he backed his car out of the garage, he looked back at his apartment and said, "mine", and he touched the dashboard and said, "mine." Sometimes at night he even repeated the ritual in a sort of reverse order and went to bed feeling very safe. Then, one morning as he touched a painting and said, "mine", he heard another voice say, "mine, too." He paused a moment and walked over to the couch, touched it and said, "mine." "Mine, too" came the voice. That really threw him. He was hesitant to say mine as he backed out the car, but still, he looked back at the apartment and said, "mine." "Mine, too" came the voice. That shook him up for several hours that morning, but by evening all seemed to be going along normally. As he got ready for bed, he touched the mirror in the bathroom and said, "mine." "Mine, too," he heard right away. At that he jumped into bed and tried to convince himself that he might be getting sick and was feverish or delusional. So, for the whole next day, he touched nothing and never said, "mine," not even once. But life didn't feel right and the day after he woke up and once again began by saying, "mine", but every time he could still hear another voice saying, "mine, too." He was sad and troubled the entire day. When evening came he tried a flurry of touching everything and saying, "mine" as fast as he could. The other voice kept up with him – "mine too, mine too." He went to bed feeling defeated. He didn't even want to get up the next morning. He laid there trying to figure out what to do. Finally he slowly touched his dresser and said, "yours." "Ours" came the voice.

This is a day to consider that voice that tells us, "Ours." Ours, our world, our thoughts, our lives and what we share with others. This is a time to reflect on possessions and wealth and what we trust in for our security and what might change in the future – the coming end of our own lives, of the end of Jesus' reign on earth, of the end of the world as we know it – of the Second Coming and the Day of Judgment. This is the end of the church year – Advent will begin in two more Sundays, after we celebrate Christ the King next Sunday. It is nearing the end of our calendar year. We are entering the months of year-end spending, closing of financial books, figuring of taxes, and the planning of New Year resolutions and changes.

And in the midst of this reflective time I challenge us to consider anew our understanding of Ours and also of what endures. Is there really anything we can touch and say, “mine?”

We somewhat limited, somewhat unimaginative, somewhat frail human beings – we latch onto things for security – a holy mountain, a holy city, a holy temple, a holy nation – a hope that we are a chosen people who have figured things out. These are all mine and life will go as I have planned it. That’s why those Thessalonians are sitting around idle. They’ve figured out that the second coming is imminent, so why work anymore? That’s why folks were incredulous when Jesus spoke of the temple falling apart. It just couldn’t happen that way. Jerusalem was the holy city and the temple the place where God resided. But Jesus tells them, “don’t try to figure these things out. Keep living, keep going, you don’t know what’s going to happen next.” In fact, just trust in my Spirit to give you the strength and the words and the ways to endure.

That’s not so comforting to people who like to plan, to people who like to have an idea of what’s coming around the bend. We like to figure that with God at our side, we can do things right and all will go well. Healthy habits, security – aren’t those important?

I’m thinking – perhaps not. I’ve just finished a wonderful book called, “Birds Without Wings.” It is the story of the rise to power of Mustafa Kemal Attaturk and the start of modern day Turkey. Within the span of thirty years the land that gave birth to the apostle Paul, the places that he found so fertile for the sowing of the gospel – the land of Thessolonika, of Ephesus, Galatia, Colossae, and Nicaea – the places of the great Byzantine cathedrals, the center of Constantinople and early Christianity – it was wiped out. Greek Christians and Armenian Christians were both slaughtered and moved into other lands. It was an amazing displacement of peoples and cultures.

And as I shake my head while reading about the turmoil and violence and atrocities, I realize that nothing that we can touch and call “mine” endures forever. The Jews could not grasp that Jerusalem wouldn’t endure forever as theirs. The Israelites were sure they could possess whatever land they wanted. The British Empire thought that worldwide power was theirs. We believe that we are the chosen nation and our ways are right.

But Jesus tells us to have another world in view. God is about to create a new heaven and a new earth. It won’t unfold like we imagine. It won’t happen on our timing. And it won’t be mine – it will be ours. Ours – God with the rest of us. All of us together. There is another world in view.

Thanks be to God.