

Sermon 29.7.07 St Aug's Titus 2 . 11-14....ref to John 17.

Believing and behaving
In light of Christ's glorious appearing

In the world but not of it John 17 it matters how we live.....

how then shall we live ?

- are we any different from our neighbours or just the same with the addition that we attend church on Sunday?

STORY

If you have never visited Wales in the UK,introduce you to a beautiful strip of coast-line ... Gower Peninsula. I spent many summers here on our family vacation.4 weeks staying in a very old 'caravan'RV equiv. ...so old ...could not be towed,... stood on 2 large rusty oil drums,years.....no toilet or shower, no fridge or electric hook-up.....slept 6,and we were 8!tiny stove with 2 small rings ..smallest 'oven' you have ever seen,my mum managed to cook for us, even roast chicken I remember ..baked puddings too –...!! no camp fires/fire pits ...no outside cooking,showers15 min walk away (thankfully washrooms bit closer !).

SO, since coming out to Canada 4 years ago, ..looked with interest ...RVsmany people towing something ...prairies /mountains / coast line ...summer holidays. We considered it too,not seriously, **until this year.**

We ummed and 'ahed'talked.... thought ...prayed.....on one hand itgreatto just hitch up - go out into the sticks for a night or two,quality family timeout-of-doors together. to always have something in which to stay' ...able to move on and explore.....
other hand,expensive venturedepending.... was it decadent?? ... what God would have us do...? Lots of qus!..... Pete open...more cautious.....wanted try-out first,,,,,,,

Long story short – bought a brand new travel trailer from a Christian family south of High River.

Next problem.

With what do we tow it ?

such an area of confusion and conflicting advice from diff. people.....all new to us !!

But we keep coming back to the area of **faith-related choices** - we want it all to come under the authority of Christ, and under His direction.....
he gave us brains to work out these things ...don't want to be greedy,

don't want to be getting everything ..just cos we want it !.....'in the world, but not of the world'.....you get the picture!

Amongst those who move in the prophetic, who are aware of God speaking through dreams, visions, impressions or more obvious and direct words from the Lord, there is the sense now that the time of preparing..... the time of waiting is coming to an end, that things are changing.....that 'something' is afoot....God is on the move in a particular way.....something significant lies waiting..... that is not to say Christ's 2nd coming is necessarily immanent...of course, we do not know the day or the hour, as we are told – he will come when we least expect it, but He **WILL** come.....and there is an urgent need to be prepared, to be ready, to have hearts right before God, through faith in His Son Jesus Christ.....

You may be aware that, for a few weeks now, GB has been inundated with water – it has rained and rained and rained....at the beginning of this month the Sunday telegraph reported that *The floods that have devastated swathes of Great Britain, according to senior Church of England bishops, are God's judgment on the immorality and greed of modern society.*

One diocesan bishop has even claimed that laws that have undermined marriage, including the introduction of pro-gay legislation, have provoked God to act by sending the storms that have left thousands of people homeless.

While those who have been affected by the storms are innocent victims, the bishops argue controversially that the flooding is a result of Western civilization's decision to ignore biblical teaching.

The Rt Rev Graham Dow, Bishop of Carlisle, argued that the floods are not just a result of a lack of respect for the planet, but also a judgment on society's moral decadence.

"This is a strong and definite judgment because the world has been arrogant in going its own way," he said. "We are reaping the consequences of our moral degradation, as well as the environmental damage that we have caused."

"We are in serious moral trouble because every type of lifestyle is now regarded as legitimate," he said.

"In the Bible, institutional power is referred to as 'the beast', which sets itself up to control people and their morals. Our government has been playing the role of God in saying that people are free to act as they want," he said, adding that the introduction of recent pro-gay laws highlighted its determination to undermine

marriage.

The West is also being punished for the way that it has exploited poorer nations in its pursuit of economic gain. "It has set up dominant economic structures that are built on greed and that keep other nations in a situation of dependence. The principle of God's judgment on nations that have exploited other nations is all there in the Bible," he said.

He urged people to respond to the latest floods by turning away from a lifestyle of greed, and instead - **live thinking of the consequences of their actions.**

Today, I invite you to look at the two main support pillars on which the future of humanity rests. They are **events in time**; and God has determined that they will carry the future for all of God's creation—not just humanity—for on these pillars rests God's solution to a much more comprehensive cosmic challenge.

God's intent is to make the future secure for all. Paul hints at these pillars in this passage from Titus 2. They are, quite simply, the **first and the second coming of Christ.**

One is **past**; we celebrate it every Christmas,.....
And the Bible tells us to get the other one **in focus**, and to live in anticipation of it. Arising out of the first comes our longing for, as well as the power to live in anticipation of, His second coming.

The scenario which the New Testament presents of human history is that it is rapidly moving toward a climax at which everything that is evil, hurtful, and destructive will be overcome and wiped out by the forces of good.

My son Christopher - and lets face it, my husband Pete too, enjoy **Star Wars** movies '**May the Force be with you**'. And, as in all good movies, the good guys win – good triumphs over evil...>>>>>>>>. **slide**

If the messages of the book of Revelation tell us little else with absolute clarity, this is *one* message which is unequivocal and clear. **Christ is and will be the Victor**, and His cause will be vindicated.

The age-old battle between Christ and Satan is moving rapidly towards an inevitable and certain conclusion. Our world as we know it is coming apart!. But **The Force of Christ** is way, WAY, **WAY** more powerful than the enemy – we don't

believe in dualism; Satan **is** a defeated foe; he just finds that very hard to accept.....

In Rev 21.5, The Alpha and Omega, our Redeemer says, **"Behold, I make all things new."** And in that new order Christ promises that **"there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed**

away” (Rev. 21:3-5). Praise GOD !! And that is the climax towards which our world is moving relentlessly and unstoppably. We live in anticipation of that moment. We live in the **between-times**.....the **Now and Not yet**... the kingdom is *here* and yet it is not fully realized –there is more and better to come...

When Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, the reign of God had truly begun its appearance on earth. God’s power was present in Jesus, which explains why **blind eyes were opened** and **demons fled**. But the kingdom hadn’t fully come, even though it was already present. And Jesus, though he was announcing and inaugurating the kingdom, hadn’t finished everything for his graduation as Messiah.

This work, as it turned out, wasn’t just proclaiming the kingdom and demonstrating its presence through works of power and love. For the kingdom of God to come fully, Jesus had to do **something else**, something so **radical**, paradoxical, and unexpected that nobody anticipated it. **The Messiah had to die!!**

We know it is coming, we know Jesus will return! but we don’t know ‘when’; its not for us to know the date or hour.....

When we sing songs like ‘Maranatha’; *Oh Lord come, oh Lord come! we await your presence , oh Lord come*.....do we REALLY mean it I wonder, or is it just a pretty song that gives us goose-bumps?

The important question for me to ask is: **How does the certainty of this scenario affect me and how do I prepare for it?** And that is a very personal question, and it is also a corporate one.

An ongoing question that the NC in England ask themselves is “ **how then shall we live?** “ and “ **How shall we live in a foreign land?**”

our citizenship is in heaven, we reside here **only temporarily** in these bodies which eventually wear out [as some of us are only too aware!] – **that** is the glorious future of those who belong to Christ! Not the wearing out bit, but the going to heaven bit !! That is good news my friends, very good news indeed !!

Remember the Spice girls from the mid '90s –the song that made them famous?

Yo, I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want,
So tell me what you want, what you really really want,
I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want,
So tell me what you want, what you really really want,
I wanna, I wanna, I wanna, I wanna, I wanna really
really really wanna zigzag ha.

What a load of nonsense !!

Life is not about 'what I want'

You will answer to God for your life, I for mine. **But collectively we shall also have to answer for the directions, choices, and values of the community for which you and I have been entrusted with some responsibility.**

As HB in the West we live increasingly isolated lives, do we not? Consider the popularity of the internet and emailing and cell phones and conference calls...we do not even need to be in the office these days – we can be by ourselves at home...that is the way we live these days.....rushing from one pressure to the next, grabbing our Starbucks on the way..... most of us don't drop-in on neighbours anymore.....we don't pass the time of day, unless of course it is scheduled into our calendars

But we are community – as the body of Christ, even just as human-beings, as neighbours, as this church parish..... how we live together, how we are with each other, all that matters..

As individuals and as community we need to face the question: ***What can we do and how should we prepare for what is coming?***

The answer comes in 3 segments – **personal**, as **community**, and as **witness**

The PERSONAL bit—This is private and has to do with me as an individual. Well, it's between me and God really (or you and God)..... Paul, writing to Titus, says that the reality of Christ's second coming compels us individually and personally to "***say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives***" (Tit. 2:12). What does that mean?

So many of us find it difficult to say 'no' to anything we feel we really want....

There **few** passages in the New Testament which vividly set out the **moral power of Jesus Christ**—the power to change lives—but this text does so succinctly and clearly. This is the moral power both to say '**no**' and to say '**yes.**'

Isaiah, similarly, appealed to his people to "stop doing wrong, learn to do right" (Isa. 1:16,17); and Paul elsewhere writes: "***Hate what is evil, cling to what is good***" (Rom. 12.9).

It is an appeal to give up pursuing that which you and I know to be destructive, debilitating, and degrading to both yourself / myself and those who surround us. Instead, there is so much good that can be done.

Basically, what God says to us is: Be a force for good! You know what is good! Ignorance is not the problem of God's people; but disobedience is. So use your energy to pursue what is good.

Keith Green and his wife wrote the song we have just sung – *There is a redeemer* – Keith was 15 the first time he ran away from home. He started a journal that ran for years as he looked for musical adventure and spiritual truth. Keith had a Jewish background, but he grew up reading the New Testament. He called it "an odd combination" that left him open minded, but deeply unsatisfied. His journey led him to drugs, eastern mysticism, and free-love.

When Keith was 19 he met a fellow seeker/musician named Melody. They were married a year later -- but his spiritual quest continued. Then when he had nearly given up hope, Keith found the truth he was looking for. He was 21 and he never looked back.

What once confused him now made sense as he proudly told the world, "I'm a Jewish Christian." As soon as Keith opened his heart to Jesus, he and Melody opened their home. Anyone with a need, or who wanted to kick drugs, or get off the street, was welcome. Of course, they always heard plenty about Jesus.

Not only did Keith's life take a radical turn, but as an accomplished musician and songwriter, so did his music. His quest for stardom ended. His songs now reflected the absolute thrill of finding Jesus and seeing his own life radically changed. Keith's spiritual intensity not only took him beyond most people's comfort zones, but it constantly drove him even beyond himself.

Somewhat reluctantly, Keith was thrust into a "John the Baptist" type ministry—calling believers to wake up, repent, and live a life that looked like what they said they believed. Keith felt he would have met Jesus sooner if not for Christians who led double lives. He made audiences squirm by saying, "If you praise and worship Jesus with your mouth and your life does not praise and worship him, there's something wrong!"

For Keith, meeting Jesus was one thing. Becoming more like Him was another. After striving for years to measure up to God's holiness, at times questioning his own salvation, Keith came into a deeper understanding of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross—both to forgive his sins, and to clothe him in His own righteousness. It wasn't that Keith became less concerned with purity and holiness. But he was now motivated more by love and less by fear in His pursuit of Jesus.

While on earth, Keith struggled with the same things we do—discipline, deadlines, problems crying for attention. He had music to write and a growing family. And he was also discipling the 70 believers who had come to be part of Last Days Ministries—the ministry he and Melody expanded from the outreach that began in their home. But he learned, in the midst of it all, the importance of pausing simply to behold the glory of God and to enjoy His presence. That is perhaps, more than anything, the legacy Keith would have wanted us to remember.

On July 28, 1982, there was a small plane crash and Keith went home to be with Jesus. The crash also took the life of his three year old son Josiah, and his two year old daughter, Bethany. Melody was home with their one year old, Rebekah, and was also six weeks pregnant with their fourth child, Rachel. Keith was only 28 years old.

Keith Green was simply a man of conviction. When his convictions led him to an eternally worthy object in the person of Jesus he sold all that he had—ambitions, possessions, and dreams—to

possess His love. In so doing he became a man of devotion. He also became a man remembered, and still missed, by millions around the world.

Sometimes the question is asked and particularly in conversation with youth: *How do you **know** whether you should or should not do something? Everyone does it. Why shouldn't I? It's expected, it's part of being in the crowd; it's a way to belong.....*

: (1) Sometimes, but not always, the Bible gives an **objective and absolute** standard. The Bible draws the line—there is a clear **'yes'** or **'no'**; it's a 'black-and-white' answer. And it is important to know what that is.

Now many might find that very arbitrary, very cold, very clinical, and, yes, very legalistic. But there is also a second kind of answer we have to look for:

(2) As a young person in particular, but also for those of us who are a little older! you have to ask yourself: **What is becoming of me as a person?** What is happening to me? Is doing whatever you are considering doing good for you? Are you going to like yourself better afterwards? Will others respect you more? Or are you in fact doing damage to yourself and to your own future, and to those who love you?

In other words: You need to weigh what is happening to your own life—what are you doing to yourself as a person—for as a person you are of inestimable [in-es-ti-ma-ble] value to our Lord.

What did Paul mean by “worldly passions”? One of the early Fathers, Chrysostom, said that “**worldly things**” *are the things which do not pass over with us into heaven, but are dissolved together with the present world.* I guess that just about covers everything !!

Surely one is very short-sighted if one sets **all** one's heart and spends **all** one's time and energy on that which has to be left behind (it has certainly seemed a bit like that in our household in the past few days or so !)

But there is an even *more* basic meaning to the phrase “*worldly passions.*” These are the things, or values, of which we are not very proud and would rather **not** show to God.

It is the work of Christ to cleanse us from that **of which we are ashamed** that God should see. **It is the work of Christ** to make us presentable! Only He can do it, and He will do it caringly, lovingly, and protectively. He will make you and me fit for God to see. This comes through the work of the cross, through sanctification.....that's why Paul says in 2 v 14 that Jesus gave himself “ *to redeem us.....and purify for himself a people that are his very own...*”

Living in anticipation means inviting Him to “*work on me*” and get me ready. In describing what it means to live as “children of light” in anticipation of Christ’s coming, Paul says some very pointed things:

Put off falsehood and speak truthfully; don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry; watch your language; get rid of bitterness, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. Try to be nice, to be kind and compassionate; and try to forgive for you have been forgiven so much (see Eph. 4: 25-32).

And again, linking it specifically to the second coming of Christ, **Peter** writes: “Since everything will be destroyed . . . make every effort to be found blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:11,14). The moral power of Christ—the power of His resurrection - is not just the power to say ‘no’ but also every bit as much the power to say ‘yes’—‘yes’ to prudence, to moral goodness, to justice, to reverence before God, and to allowing the fruits of the spirit to develop. It is living in **anticipation of Christ’s second coming**, which is the reality that drives this.

It is important that we note that living in anticipation of Christ’s return is not a negative lifestyle, although clearly there are things to which we need to say ‘no’. It is a positive, constructive, and creative life full of energy which reaches out to do good for others and for yourself.

As Christians, we choose LIFE each day, not death! Paul’s longing is to “*know Christ and the power of his resurrection*” (Phil. 3:10), which is power over death and decay.

It means not to be destructive of yourselves or of others. It means to be so united with Christ day by day that we let the values **He** modeled be lifted high in our lives and seen in the choices we make. His **physical resurrection** will then assure our **bodily resurrection** when He returns.

2) AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH living in anticipation of His coming.

How is life to be experienced within the church between individuals who share the same values and the same hopes? And this has a lot to do with relationships—with people treating people (2 Cor. 2:15). It has to do with people being the “fragrance of Christ.” Reflect with me for a few moments on this:

(a) **1 Peter 3:8**: “*Live in harmony with one another . . . be sympathetic, compassionate and humble.*” In other words - **Be nice to each other** !.

(b) **James 4:11**: “*Do not slander one another.*” This refers to the habit of making destructive comments about someone else in that person’s absence when he is

not there to defend himself. This, a common habit, is condemned throughout Scripture. (See Titus 3:1.)

To judge another person is to take unto ourselves a right to do that which God alone has the right to do; and he/she is a reckless man/woman who deliberately infringes on the prerogatives of God.

(c) *“Bear with each other and forgive grievances you may have against one another” (Col.3:13).*

This statement comes in the midst of a list of qualities which God’s chosen people are expected to display. And they all have to do with relationships between people. This is the positive side to the “not slandering.”

The Message Bible puts it this way:

*“So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for **you**: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, **wear love**. This is your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.”*

Jesus, at the moment of His most extreme physical suffering, set the standard for forgiveness when He said: *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”*

Is there then anything which the follower of Christ should or can not forgive? And when we can not forgive ‘in the natural’, we can ask Jesus to help us forgive, to even put in our heart **His** forgiveness for the offender.....

(d) Come together and *“encourage one another—and all the more so as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25); and when you do, remember to pray for and support your leaders (Heb.13:17, 18)*

.One of the noblest of human duties is to speak encouragement to each other. It is easy to pour cold water on someone’s enthusiasm; it is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers.

We have a Christian duty to **encourage** each other. The going ahead of us is tough. Let us help each other. And when you do that, please, remember your leaders. Life on the podium of leadership can get lonely and chilly. And when your church leaders (inc. Vestry) make mistakes, just remember that you chose them from among yourselves, and they are not “translated” yet.

How often does Jonathan, bless him, tell us of his latest human-ness, his latest speeding ticket or a fall-out with the kids?!

And man, you really don't want to be

.....We are all frail human beings and daily need His grace and strength to help us.....

(3) How we live OUTWARDLY AS A WITNESS to the world which is not of faith. How is my church as a **community**, and I as a part of it—we who live in anticipation of His coming—how are we to relate to those who do not know Christ and do not share His values? After all, the church exists for mission. As someone once said – The church exists for its non-members!

There is a committed member of this congregation who prays for the Lord to show her each week, just one person with whom she can share her faith; It might be standing in a line-up at Wal-mart, or out for

(a) Jesus taught that there is a work to be done. Time is running out. *“Night is coming when no one can work”* he said (John 9:4). With an eye to our role as the community of believers, Jesus said that **we are to be his witnesses**, and we are to make **disciples**.the two are not the same.

Graham spoke about this last Sunday and if you didn't hear it, you can find his sermon on the church website.... Being a “witness” is a primary function of

telling it as it is. **Sharing what you have found**. Whatever happens next may flow from the witness, but there is the role of witnessing even when you have no influence on what happens next.

In terms of the mission of the church in the 10/40 window, this is pretty much where we are.

The 10/40 Window is an area of the world that contains the largest population of non-Christians in the world. The area extends from 10 degrees to 40 degrees North of the equator, and stretches from North Africa across to China.

In so many places all we can do is deliver a witness. The human interaction by which we can influence the response is in many places difficult or impossible to have. The **Lord and the Spirit** are at work, and I may or may not be able to be part of it, and we may not see the harvest..... We play our part in planting seeds, but the Lord knows who brings in the harvest and it might not be us! That's OK.....**Living in anticipation of Christ's return will always mean to live in mission.**

Jen and Ethan are joining with a team out in Grenada for two weeks starting tomorrow. This is part of mission, By helping out in practical ways in an area badly affected by hurricanes, they are

(b) **Be known in your community as men/women of peace**. (Heb. 12:14). What does this mean?

Firstly, there is the kind of peace of mind which comes from knowing that you are doing the right

thing; primarily, in that you are **acting to the best of your knowledge in harmony with what God wants and expects of you**. Obedience to God gives peace of mind. It is important to be at **peace with yourself**.

Secondly, live in peace with the people with whom you meet and associate. We remember the well-known injunction of the Lord: *“Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called children of God.”* (Matt 5)

The word “peace” in the Bible is never just a negative word to denote the absence of trouble; it means also to be **positively driven to seek man’s highest good**; not just freedom from trouble but enjoyment of all that is good, and a sense of being safe.

Peace-makers seek to make this world a better place for all to live in.

A statement attributed to Abraham Lincoln says:

“Die when I may, I would like it to be said of me, that I always pulled up a weed and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.”

There *are* those people who seem to be mean-spirited and cantankerous, who cause quarrels themselves or between others.....then there are folk who seem particularly good at bridging the gulf between people; they heal breaches; they bring sweetness to that which is bitter. They do a God-like work.

We have both kinds in the church.

Conclusion :

I take you back to the verse with which we started these thoughts: Titus 2:11-13:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared. . . It teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and savior, Jesus Christ.”

As Christians, we **are called to live in anticipation of His coming**. Times are changing – this world cannot go on for ever as it is doing; we are only too aware in the West of **apostacy and erroneous teaching in the church and ‘wolves in sheep’s’ clothing’ leading the flock astray**, let **alone corruption, greed and falsehood in political and public life**,.....and strange weather patterns which may be attributed to global warming, that threatens our very existence.....

Jesus taught that we are to be **IN** the world, but not **OF** it.....**lights shining** for him in a world of **darkness**, but we have the secret of the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.....lets not keep that

secret to *ourselves*, but share it, so that others may also come to know for *themselves* the joy of God's salvation.....

Therefore, my prayer for us all is:

“May God himself, the God of peace,
Sanctify you through and through.
May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless
At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The one who calls you is faithful
and he will do it.”

Amen

[1 Thess. 5: 23, 24:]