

Sermon by Rev. Allison J. Beaulieu
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church
November 26, 2006

What Is Your Theme Song?

Well, I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving. I certainly had a great day with my family and of course, Aunt Ruth's baked beans. I think I spoke about those beans once before which I guess makes them infamous...and they are. I have a new motto for family dinners that include some horrendous food like baked beans or any other food I have to force down. It goes like this, "God, where you lead I will follow; what you feed me, I will swallow." And, that's the truth.

I was a little dismayed to find out that three of the five radio stations I have programmed into my car are playing Christmas music 24/7. I like Christmas music, I really do, I just don't know if I'm ready for a steady dose of it. Speaking of music, I like all kinds of music. Perhaps you know this about me. I like music so much that I almost pulled a Jonah and began working in the music industry just to avoid God's call to me. I gave up the music industry, but I never gave up music. Because I love music so much, I almost always have a theme song, which is a song that plays in my head throughout the day. Now, this theme song usually changes periodically depending on the kind of week I'm having. For example, during my vacation, my theme song was "*Good Vibrations*" by the Beach Boys—could there be a better vacation song? When I returned to Pittsburgh, my song became "*Back on the Chain Gang*" by the Pretenders. Appropriate, isn't it?

I sometimes listen to country. It's not my favorite, but I listen to it. The only youth in this congregation that likes country is Jessica Holden who strangely seems to know all the words to every country song ever recorded. When we are taking youth trips in my car, I have this policy that whoever sits in the front seat (or shotgun) has control of the radio. So, needless to say, whenever Jess has shotgun, we are always listening to country. One day, after Jess had been in my car, I left the country station on and discovered a new theme song. It wasn't "*Crazy*" by Patsy Cline, although that certainly applies to me sometimes. And, it wasn't "*Man, I Feel Like a Woman*" by Shania Twain

although going to a woman's college, this song did seem to come up as a theme song on various occasions. This song was called "*I Keep Looking*" and it's about a person who is always unsatisfied. She sings, "I keep looking, I keep looking for something more, Just as soon as I get what I want, I get unsatisfied. Good is good but could be better." The reason this became my theme song for the week was because I found myself in a period of living in the future. I was not thinking about the present because it was unsatisfying. I kept thinking how different things would be and how much happier I would be in the future. I was essentially stuck in the future.

Today I want to talk about the issue of time and the power time has over us. I want to look at the way it can affect not only our personal life, but also how it can affect our spiritual experience.

A lot of us are bound by our watch. We are constantly thinking of what we have to do, where we have to be and when everything has to be done. We're caught up in the future and we are completely side-tracked by the "not-yet". I have always liked the story of the busy business man who said, "I've got so many troubles that if anything bad happens today it will be two weeks before I can worry about it!" If you can resonate with this man, your theme song might be "*Headed for the Future*" by Neil Diamond or "*Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow*" by Fleetwood Mac. And, if you're a child of the 80's your theme song may be "*The Future is so Bright, I Have to Wear Shades.*"

Let me give you an example from my own life of living in the "not yet." When Keith and I arrived in Pittsburgh, frankly, all I could think of was moving back closer to our family and friends and familiar surroundings, whether that be Philadelphia or New York. I did not have a pastoral position when we first moved here which provided me ample time to live in the future—a future where things were different. I would actually look at websites for Presbyterian churches closer to home and look at various towns to live in—anything to get my mind off of the current state of affairs. Perhaps you do this when you're not happy where you are.

There is also a tendency to focus on the "not yet" in our spiritual lives. The book of Revelation centers on Christ's return. It envisions the coming of Christ and how Christ's reign will be ushered in. It describes "'the final triumph of God' over death and all the forces that resist God's will and disrupt the creation." (Migliore, Faith Seeking

Understanding, 231). There is no doubt that Christian hope for Christ's return is an important part of the faith experience. However, when Christ's coming overshadows Christ's life, death, and resurrection, it gives us an incomplete picture of the work God has done, is doing, and will do...through Christ.

In the same way, just as it is easy to live in the future, it is also easy to live in the past—in memories of a different time and place. If you are sidetracked by the past, your theme songs may be “*Yesterday*” by the Beatles, “*Memories*” from the Broadway show Cats or for those of you who are partial to 1950's music—“*Moments to Remember*” by the Four Lads (Don't ask me how I know about The Four Lads). Indeed, it is easy to want to travel back in time, perhaps when things were better, or easier, or you were all-round more happy.

If we did this in our spiritual life (if we focused only on the past—on Christ's earthly ministry and death) we would miss the complete picture—how God's redemptive work is to come full circle and how God's completion of creation results in our perfect fellowship with God and each other.

When we live primarily in the future or in the past, we have a tendency to miss what's right in front of us. In our scripture for today, we are told that God is the “Alpha and Omega”. For those of you who may not know, alpha and omega are the Greek letters for A and Z. So, God is the first and the last. The first thing that came to my mind as I was thinking about the term “Alpha and Omega” was bookends—two stabilizing forces on each end of a line of books to keep them in place. But, the more I thought about this image, the more I found faults with it. You see, if God is “Alpha and Omega”, God is not the bookends of our life. God is like the whole bookshelf. God is not only in our beginning and only in our end, God is the shelf that stabilizes us and sustains us. God is the wood all around that contains us and holds us fast. In other words, God is just not A and Z, my friends, but every letter in between.

So, what comfort can that bring you in your personal lives? What does the fact that God is Alpha and Omega mean to us? I'll tell you what I think it means. It means that Christ encompasses the totality of our lives—the past, the future, and the present. God is the context in which our lives and the world around us must be understood. We can think back on the past and say to ourselves, “Christ was more present to me then.”

Or, on the flip side, we can think of our future and say to ourselves, “Christ will be more present with me in the future.” And yet the truth of the matter is that Christ is present with you now, this very minute—just as he was present with you in the past, and just as he will be present with you in the future. You see, Christ reigns over time. Although our spiritual lives and our personal lives may seem bound by time, we are not bound at all, but freed in Christ. The challenge is to allow Christ, not time, to be the ruler of your life.

I am certainly not saying that we can’t be visionaries and I’m not saying that we shouldn’t remember and appreciate our past. What I am saying is that we should not be one-sided with our focus, but that we should see Christ in our past, our future, and our present lest we fail to see the blessings that lie right in front of us.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in his poem A Psalm of Life writes about the passage of time and forces us to remember there is no gift like the present. He writes:

*Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act, - act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!*

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sand of time;*

*Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.*

*Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.*

Speaking of time, this is the last Sunday of the liturgical year. Next week is Advent and we begin a new cycle. This Sunday is often referred to as Christ the King Sunday when we celebrate Christ as the ruler and author of our lives, of human history, and of the universe.

In his Four Quartets, T.S. Eliot penned this famous line: “In my beginning is my end.” And then at the end of this second quartet, he writes, “In my end is my beginning.”

In this end of the liturgical year, we see Christ today as we see him in the past and in the future—as God’s gift to us, as triumphant, as supreme. We see that history, like the liturgical year, begins and ends with Christ. It begins with a babe lying in a manger and it ends with Christ coming with the clouds in the form a lamb, the suffering servant, meek and mild, but with a power beyond all earthly power. Friends, Christ is what we hope for and what we have hoped for. In the end is our beginning.

So, what could be our theme song for today?—a celebration of what God has done and what God will do--- and what God is doing right here and now. It goes a little like this, “All creatures of our God and King, Lift up your voice and with us sing, Alleluia, Alleluia”. Amen.