

Pastor's Ponderings January – February 2024

*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled:
my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every
people: a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people.*
- Luke 2:29-32

We are at the beginning of another new year. What if this year were to be your last? It's a question I started asking myself 20 years ago when I was first diagnosed with cancer. As it turned out, although it returned twice after that, I survived the cancer and have been free of it more than 12 years now. But, with cancer you never know. None of us ever knows. It can be a good thing to keep in mind.

If you are younger, it might seem morbid or depressing to think of one's death. But death is a basic fact of life. There is no question that we will die, and people die all along the way at every age and stage of life.

One of the privileges I have as a pastor is getting to spend time with people at the end of their life. Many people *don't* like to be around death or dying people, but I find it a true gift. Death is inevitably a holy and reverent time, which makes clear that life is infinitely precious in each moment, especially as the moments get more and more finite, as the end comes into view.

It's good to think about death, and to talk about it. The reality of death can cut right through all the distracting embellishments of life. The face of death reveals the core of life— its extreme vulnerability, as well as its extreme value.

What if you had just this one last year to live? What would you want to do with it? Or in it? What do you *need* to do during this year or see this year, or witness or resolve before you can go in peace? A year is made up of months and weeks and days and minutes. The question of how you will use your time this year translates into how you are using your time today, and tomorrow, and each day, each minute. How are you using your time? How are you spending the infinitely precious finite time you have in this life?

Think about it.

What are you called to do? Is there something you need to do before you can die in peace? If you died tomorrow, would there be some sense in which you might feel you had let God down, or let yourself down? Would there be something important that you didn't do? Perhaps you might consider making a "last year resolution" this year, right now. Ask yourself, what do I need to do before it's too late?

In the gospel of Luke, Simeon is the wise elder in the temple who makes his famous exclamation when Mary and Joseph bring the baby Jesus in to be consecrated according to Jewish tradition: "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace...." For Simeon, he didn't need to *do* anything, he just needed to see the Lord's messiah in order to die in peace.

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