

Many of us may know that a man named Harold Camping predicted that the rapture would occur yesterday. If he was right, guess what, bad news. We've been left behind. The Baptists were all taken and the Presbyterians have all been left. According to Camping, we have about 6 months of really bad tribulation before the world comes to an end.

Like many of you, I have been making fun of the rapture prediction. But then I was listening yesterday to NPR on the radio and I heard a young couple interviewed that were followers of Camping. The young man expressed relief that he did not have to worry about his retirement. He had a sense of relief that he did not have to worry about tomorrow because it was all taken care of. I wonder how difficult this morning must be for them. What about their children?

Now I may be wrong. But let's assume this morning that Camping's prediction did not come true. As far as I can tell, he misread the Bible. For he claimed to be able to reveal something that Jesus, himself, said he could not predict. Jesus, himself, said that he did not know when the end of time would occur. But even though Jesus claimed ignorance to the end of time, this has not stopped others from making these predictions. But why have so many people spent so much money buying products produced by people who tell us when the world will end and who have written novels like the "left Behind" series about how the world will end?

I wonder if one reason we spend so many of our time and energy trusting people to provide accurate predictions of the future is that we don't like living in uncertain times. We like answers. We like accuracy. We like for someone to tell us exactly what is going to happen next, when it is going to happen, and how it is going to happen. We like certainty.

Like many of you, I keep a calendar. I am old fashioned in that I still like a paper calendar rather than a phone or other device. On my calendar it tells me that I have a meeting tomorrow at 6:30 pm with the Christian Education committee. I plan to be at that meeting.

But guess what. We don't know what tomorrow brings. As much as many of us plan out our calendars and schedule what happens tomorrow and the day after that, we don't really know what is going to happen tomorrow. We cannot predict for certainty what happens tomorrow. Tomorrow may bring some unexpected joy or tomorrow may bring some unexpected sorrow. And if we think we can turn to the Bible to find some clear answer about what will happen tomorrow, then we are making the Bible something it is not.

We are going to spend the next few weeks reading through the letter we call First Peter. There are two letters written by Peter. One we call First Peter and one we call 2nd Peter. There is debate among scholars about whether Simon Peter wrote this letter or whether one of his followers wrote this letter and used his name which was sometimes done in that period. But what we do know is that this letter was written to Christians who were undergoing suffering and they were concerned about what their future held for them. They were frightened by the future.

But Peter writes to them and informs them that they do not need to fear the future. Instead of being scared by the future they are to live into that future with a living hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that faith in Christ gives them something that is unfading and cannot be destroyed.

Peter knows that the Christians that he is writing to are suffering. They feel like they are aliens in their own land. But Peter says even though you are suffering, live into the future with a living hope.

As I have been working on this sermon I have also been visiting John Cloninger in the hospital. John, as most folks here know, is the oldest member of Allison Creek. John will turn 93 in a couple of weeks. John's toe has been bothering him so he went into the hospital about a week ago. John was initially told that his toe was infected and that the doctors would probably have to remove it.

But as the staff looked more and more into the infection in John's body, the hospital staff made the decision to not just remove the toe but also the foot and the entire leg.

So when I stopped by on Thursday to see John, John was sitting up in his bed. He now has one leg and one stump. I stop by and he is sitting up in his bed and eating his dinner. Now, if you were sitting in a hospital bed having just had your leg removed when you went in for a toe removal, what would you be thinking about? What would be your attitude?

Let me tell you about what John was thinking about. The first thing John says to me is this, "my offering envelope is over there. Would you make sure to get that to church for me? I can't be there for a while."

John has lost his leg and he is thinking about you and me. He is concerned that the ministries of this church are supported. He is concerned that he keeps his commitment to you when he completed his pledge card. He is concerned that he keeps his commitment to God with his financial commitment. So he is not focused on himself. He is focused on you, me, and God.

And then John says, "You know, this is just another challenge in life. But I can make it."

How should we live our life? Well, we can look at our present sufferings and complain about what is happening to us. We can be pitiful and take the attitude that the world is against us, that God is against us, that life is one set back after another. We can be fearful about what tomorrow will bring because we do not like the sufferings we are enduring today.

I know that some of us are suffering. Maybe your suffering is financial. Not sure where the money is going to come from to pay whatever bills are before you. Maybe your suffering is a marital relationship that is about to end. Your life has been structured one way and it is about to change and you do not know what the future holds.

Maybe someone close to you has died or moved away and you do not know what life without that person will be like for you. Maybe you have just moved to a new community or to a new school and the future looks very confusing to you right now.

When we get scared of the future, we can put our trust in people like Harold Camping who provide us absolutes about what tomorrow holds for us. People who may seduce us with their Christian lingo or charismatic talk. Just because someone reads the Bible doesn't mean they have a very good theological understanding of the Bible. We can pay money and buy books of people who will tell us exactly what we can expect tomorrow and how tomorrow will play itself out. We can do that and it may provide us a false sense of security.

Or we can follow the advice that Peter gave to a scared group of Christians who were living about 30-50 years after the death of Christ who were feeling disconnected and confused. Peter told them that the future is a place of hope. That the way to live into the future is to live into an attitude where you cast aside malice, insincerity, envy and slander. Live into your salvation, Peter says.

You see, the past has been created. The future has not been created. God can work through you and me to help God in creating the future together.

Peter says that we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God's own people.

Tomorrow is not something to be feared. Tomorrow is a day of hope.

Live today with that hope for tomorrow. Live today with the belief that God calls us to create a hope filled and blessed tomorrow. AMEN.

-Text: I Peter 1:1-9; 2: 1-10

-Given: May 22, 2011 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)

Prayer of confession:

Forgive us, O God, for the messes we have made of our pasts. We have participated in some activities which have left others hurt. When we could have done something really beautiful we worried about what others would think. We went along with the crowd when we could have stood out of the crowd. We have not trusted your future for our lives. We have allowed present sufferings to prevent us from living with a hope filled tomorrow. Show us a new way for the future and lead us to work with you to create what you desire.

Prayers of the People:

Creator God, we lift up the places that have suffered terrible tragedy lately. Hear us as we share these names of places at this time.

Redeeming God, we lift up the names of people who have become trapped in cults that have led them into isolation from family and from you. Hear us as we share these names at this time.

Loving God, we lift up the names of people who are undergoing serious doubts in their faith due to troubles in their lives. Hear us as we share these names at this time.

God of Tomorrow, we lift up the dreams that we have. Show us what dreams connect with your dreams and help us drop the ones that don't. We lift up to you these dreams at this time.