

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
Proper 20, Year B, September 23, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "What Endures"

in the past few years I have experienced two deaths in my immediate family; my older brother David died from cancer in 2009; my father Bill, after whom I am named, died from cancer and Alzheimer's in 2013; I was executor for both of their estates, and so it fell to me to deal with their possessions; it is strange to think just how many of our possessions will probably outlast us, and for which someone else will need to take responsibility

I am led to think of this as our Collect of the Day (BCP p. 234) speaks similarly about things that outlast us; the Collect mentions "earthly things" and "heavenly things" and then prays that "while we are placed among things that are passing away, [we] hold fast to those that shall endure"; it reminds us that while it is true that certain material objects may stick around longer than our physical bodies, there is something far more important than physical duration to be considered; we are promised by God that there is more to our existence than that of our physical bodies; the Collect is taking a longer-term view of us—by taking an eternal view of us and of our relationship to God

the Collect's wording also calls to mind last week's Gospel (Mark 8:33); recall that there Peter wanted to stop Jesus from talking about his impending death, and that Jesus "rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'"

the Collect contrasts earthly things with heavenly things; that Gospel passage contrasts human things with divine things; we might think these contrasts represent things that are completely different from each other; but it would be too quick and easy a judgment to say that these differences are always recognizable, or that we could even separate one from the other; is loving God with all our heart, soul, body, and mind a human or a divine activity?; it is both; is loving our neighbor the way Christ loved us an earthly or a heavenly attitude?; it is both

as an incarnational faith Christianity believes that Jesus lived out a divine life on this earth; he brought a heavenly plan to bear upon our human existence;

so, as Jesus did, we take our heavenly and divine outlook and we put it into action in this earthly, human world

the Collect also recognizes that we may often find ourselves overly anxious about earthly things; as an antidote to such anxiety, it urges us to set our priorities differently, and that the way to avoid anxiety about earthly things is to focus upon, and to love, heavenly things more than earthly things; but, as I've said, these are hard to separate from each other; what I would suggest, is that we consider everything we engage with in terms of how it helps or hinders our relationship to God, and how it helps or hinders our relationships with other people; another way to think of this is to try and separate the essentials of our life from the non-essentials

through prayer, through study, and through hands-on ministries, we can try to see and experience the world in this way; we can try to see and experience how this earth and our lives are imbued with the divine; this is not something that has to lead us to being overly mystical; we believe that in our Baptism we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit to live within us; in the words of the concluding Baptismal prayer, that has given us "an enquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love [God], an the gift of joy and wonder in all [God's] works" (BCP p 308); that's pretty powerful stuff if we try and live it out each and every day of our lives

this viewpoint invites us to put ourselves into a mode of thinking and living that resembles Jesus'; we do that by returning over and over again to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, to the Book of Acts and to the Epistle accounts of how the early church tried to put Jesus' ministries into action; there in Christian communities people like us worshipped together, shared in fellowship together, carried out ministries together, cared for each other in his name, and generally lived out their love of God together; the church, our church, is all about these same things today; and a lot of that is the very kind of ministries we do in our Parish Care ministries, the Commission we are highlighting today; the work that we are doing will endure, because it's not just our work we are doing—it's Christ's work; the love that we express and share will endure, because it's not just our love that we express and share—it's Christ's love; all of these things we do in Christ's name, following Christ's example, are the things that will endure