

[Psalm 54;](#)

[Wisdom 1:16-2:1\(6-11\)12-22;](#)

[James 3:16--4:6;](#)

[Mark 9:30-37](#)

If you are looking for the theme of the readings for a particular Sunday, it is best to have a look at the collect. Often the collect for the day, will pick up one or more of the themes of the readings that are to come. In today's collect, we prayed that we are not to be anxious about earthly things, and that while we are placed among the things that are passing away to hold fast to those that shall endure. I have been reading a book lately that is quite good, but that I have been finding somewhat disturbing. It is a science fiction bookⁱ by Octavia Butler and it is written about a time not long from now, around 2030. It doesn't have us flying down the streets in space ships. Instead, it describes a world that has just a little too much reality to it when you consider how things are today.

In this book, the world of 2030 is a crazy time. The world had suffered what was called a Pox, a period of 15 years from 2015 through 2030 which was a time of chaos. Some said that the Pox was caused by accidentally coinciding climatic, economic and sociological crises, but others said it would be more honest to say that the Pox was caused by our refusal to deal with obvious problems in those areas. Education has become more of a privilege of the rich rather than a basic necessity. Poverty, hunger and disease have become inevitable for more and more people. The weather has changed. Alaska, Canada and Russia are the places to be climate wise. Crops in the Midwest and South are withering from heat, drowning in floods and being torn to pieces by winds making food prices very high.

Warming weather has made tropical diseases like malaria and dengue fever a part of life in the warm wet Gulf coast and the southern Atlantic coast states. Wars rage all over the world – Kenya and Tanzania, Bolivia and Peru, Pakistan and Afghanistan have joined forces in a religious war against India, Egypt and Libya are slaughtering one another, China like Spain is tearing at itself. The new president of the USA is a former Baptist minister who has formed his own denomination that is completely intolerant of Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhist and some Christians.

Many have been forced from their homes by gangs who feel that the rich have homes. Highways are dangerous places where no one stops knowing that if they do they will be kidnapped. Children are

guarded so they will not be stolen and made into slaves. Many people live in settlements outside town using mostly 19th century technology. Doctors are scarce.

What if this was our future? It is not the one I dream about. Even though things aren't great in this world, the future in my head doesn't look that much different from today. I'll be older nearing retirement hopefully with enough to live on. There will be advances in technology that I will try my best to keep up with, but basically I'm hoping that America will not be much different than it is today – in fact I'm hoping its better. Yet I know that this world of wild weather, war, disease and society gone wild is not out of the question and it scares me. It makes me uncomfortable and it makes me realize how very attached I am to the basic things of this world – housing, education, the freedom to walk the streets and the ability to see a doctor if I need to – these things that could so easily pass away. When I read the collect, I wondered, how do we live not so we are not so attached to the world. How do we not hold fast to those things that may so easily pass away? How, when we are placed among these things which are passing away, hold fast to those that shall endure? Maybe, if we hold fast to those things that will endure, the other things will fall into place. Maybe if we remember who is at our center then we can truly live.

Going back to the science fiction story, I remembered that there was more to the story than the descriptions of the breakdown of society and the changing of the weather. In spite of the wild gangs and the lack of basic needs in the world of 2030, people are surviving. The story also tells of people looking after each other. People were forming communities – ones that worked together, survived together, played together and worshiped together. Children and adults who had lost everything were taken in given medical care and fed. When they could they rescued and bought children from the slavers that were so prevalent.

I hate to compare Jesus' prediction of his betrayal and death to a science fiction story but in many ways it must have seemed that way when the disciples heard it. It made them uncomfortable. They didn't understand and it didn't sound very good. They were hoping for a worldly Messiah, who would take over the oppressive Roman government. The idea of betrayal, suffering and killing made them uncomfortable and didn't fit into their revolutionary game plan. So they ignored Jesus and had a conversation that did make sense to them – They began to argue about who was the greatest among them. Jesus, overhearing their argument, saw the need for private instruction, sat them down, and brought a child in their midst. A child in their society had no social status. An esteemed Rabbi would never bring a child into a circle of men. Children had no rights, no voice, and no place. In

Jesus' illustration, the child represents the outcasts of society. Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Jesus re-focuses the disciples' world view and re-establishes for them God's love for all – the outcast, the poor, the lost, the least the last. Jesus challenges them they too are to love, as God loves, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Jesus teaches us, the greatest is the one who welcomes and serves all.

Maybe our world will fall apart and we will live in a world of chaos. We certainly see possibilities of that when we see the poor in the streets, the wars in the world, the terrible conditions that many already live in and the effects of global warming. Maybe the world will remain much the same in our lifetimes but no matter what happens, if we hold on to the things that will endure - the love of God, living with the love of God in our heart and the radical welcome that comes out of that - we will be all right. Even in the science fiction story, there are the images of people helping each other, welcoming each other in the midst of the chaos.

In living lives build around the welcoming and radical love of God, we will set forth a vision – a vision of love that can spread and transform the world. The love of God is a powerful thing and it is always there for us. God cares. God loves us. Sometimes the world doesn't show it. Sometimes it does. If we can live with the things that will endure in our heart – the love of God - we can change the world. If we can live with the love of God in our hearts, we can spread the love of God and the radical welcome of God in this world. This love of God can change the world no matter what happens to it. The love of God, the welcome of God is and will be there.

I'm going to end with a poem by Langston Hughes which for me captures the vision of a transformed world in which all are welcomed in the love of God.

I dream a world where man
 No other will scorn,
 Where love will bless the earth
 And peace its paths adorn.
 I dream a world where all
 Will know sweet freedom's way,
 Where greed no longer saps the soul
 Nor avarice blights our day.
 A world I dream where black or white,

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Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free,
Where wretchedness will hang its head,
and joy, like a pearl,
Attend the needs of all mankind.
Of such I dream –
Our world.

ⁱ The Parable of the Sower, Octavia, E Butler, Time Warner Book Group, 1993.