

The Day After (or Life in the World to Come)
Easter 5A
May 22, 2011
John 14:1-14

You can view a video version of this sermon on Faith's YouTube Channel:
<http://youtube.com/user/FaithFamilyNJ>



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our way, truth and life, Jesus Christ. Amen.

A couple of times during this week, people who knew that I was preaching today remarked that since the world was ending on May 21, I really didn't have to prepare for today's sermon. But, here we are, the day after. I guess the question on your mind is, "Did he prepare?" The answer. Yes. Yes, I did.

Now for those of you who have missed the billboards, the news stories, the blog conversation, the reactionary "doomsday" parties and even the Center for Disease Control's tongue-in-cheek Guide to surviving the Zombie Apocalypse, here's a summary from International Business Times:

[California](#)-based Harold Camping, who heads the Family Radio Christian network, has predicted May 21, 2011 to be the [Doomsday](#), or the Judgment Day, when around 200 million righteous will Rapture into heaven and the sinners will be left behind. According to Camping, on May 21, 2011 the world would be plagued by massive earthquakes and other natural disasters that would make [Japan](#)'s earthquake in March "look like a Sunday school picnic in comparison". Camping said the natural disasters will continue until October 2011, when the world will be destroyed completely.

Camping is quite sure about his prophecy. "We know without any shadow of a doubt it is going to happen," he said.

The [Doomsday](#) prophet has relied on the Bible to make his calculations. He combined verses in Genesis 7: 4 ("Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth") and 2 Peter 3:8 ("With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day") to conclude that the Doomsday – May 21, 2011 – will take place 7000 years after the Great Flood (4990 B.C.). Though Camping did not predict the exact hour of the [Doomsday](#), his follower Robert Fitzpatrick believes "the events of Judgment Day will begin on May 21, 2011, just before 6 p.m."

You can read more: <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/149113/20110520/doomsday-may-21-2011-harold-camping-rapture-end-of-the-world-end-of-days-judgment-day-end-time.htm#ixzz1Mu2R3GVA>
Or view a slideshow of camping supporters warning the world at http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2011/05/19/nyregion/20110520_RAPTURE-9.html?scp=8&sq=Harold%20Camping&st=cse

So, here we are on the day after. It's certainly easy to be angered by Mr. Camping and his followers. Yet, once again, fringe Christians captured the media spotlight and for days they shaped the image of who Jesus' followers are and what they have been called to do. At the same time, it's certainly easy to join in the mockery of Mr. Camping and his followers. Their Biblical literalism, ironically led them away from a plain reading of scripture and had them searching for complex and esoteric numerical codes in what they believed to be the unchanging letters and words of scripture. Their convoluted arithmetic, they believed as Gospel, and they words and letters of the printed Bible. More than that, they spent a fortune in time, talent and treasure telling the world that the final solution of the Biblical mystery was their abandonment, death and destruction.

So, we have to be careful, though, in both our ridicule and our anger, careful because this morning, in a way, we *are* left behind to explain our faith and to live to provide enduring witness to God's love, God's mercy and grace. At the heart of this matter is a basic understanding of who God is and what God is up to in this world: Is the God who raised Jesus from the dead a God who builds or destroys – who gives life or deals death? The specter of judgment, condemnation and death lurks about us every day and it certainly casts a discernible shadow in the stories and lessons we just heard read in scripture, but that's not God's work. Instead, at every turn, we find God bringing life out death, meeting condemnation with forgiveness, matching judgment with mercy, responding to hatred, fear and anger with love, enduring and steadfast love. The promise Jesus gives his disciples on the way to the cross is a promise of abundant and eternal life as a member of God's household. Stephen's vision of Christ seated at God's right hand in glory and power inspires a word of mercy and pardon for the mob that murders him. A petition God answers by transforming the ring leader of the stoning mob into one of Christ's greatest apostles. Finally, Peter's great baptismal sermon reminds God's people of every time and place that God is building and restoring God's beloved creation and constructing in that creation a temple, a dwelling of living, breathing stones who live to the praise and glory of God.

So, we are, by God's grace, part of a living temple, built on Christ as the enduring witnesses to the reality of life on the day after doomsday. Christ stands risen from the dead as the sign and the promise that God has not left us, nor abandoned us in anger, but instead God has come closer than ever in love. God has put away death and its power. That is the witness of baptism. We meet the end of life in the waters of baptism only to discover the beginning of life Jesus Christ. That is the witness of this holy meal. We remember Jesus' death, his sacrifice, only to discover his gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. This too is the mission of God for which God has gathered and sent us to live: to be the sign and foretaste of life in the world to come; to invite all into the broad and expansive and enduring love of God; to work for peace and justice and the restoration of God's world and God's creation.

There is enough fear in the world already. Beneath the anger and ridicule, you could sense the anxiety of people who already believe God has left them behind, people who know all too much about living in the shadow of death and under the threat of destruction. What a gift to find this morning that God has once again graciously given new life and new hope. Here is the way, the

truth, the life that Jesus is for us and for this world – the cross, the resurrection, the promise of life in God’s household, life in the world to come in Jesus name. Amen.