

# LATHER, RINSE, REPEAT

A Sermon by The Rev. Dr. Arthur M. Suggs  
Preached on the First Sunday of Summer, June 25, 2017

*Lectionary Reading: Deuteronomy 6:4-9.*

*In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## **A Tough Week: Cancer, Tragic Falls, Messy Parting, Visiting Graveyard**

There's an appropriate time to take a few steps back and try to get a broader perspective. This is such a time. It was a bit of a tough week. It started off with an appointment on Monday, when an old friend of mine, whom I hadn't seen in six weeks, dropped in to talk. He has a slight build, normally about 140 pounds, and in that six weeks, he had dropped 20 pounds.

He told me his prostate number is well over a hundred. While I'm talking with him, I knew that his cancer had already metastasized. He mentioned later that his hemoglobin count was very low. The cancer had found its way to his bones. None of this is confirmed yet except for the prostate diagnosis, but in my heart I felt that I'm not going to see him very much longer.

Also, our community suffered a tragedy in the last ten days or so, when two middle-aged men died as a result of falling off their ladders.

Then two members of our church chose to leave last week in a messy way. I didn't announce it back then, but following the coffee hour today, there will be a congregational conversation to ask questions about the story.

Janet and I will be available to answer any and all questions about that.

It was a couple months ago that we lost David Agard, a dear friend and one of the saints of the church. Back then, Doug Garner and I drove to Smithville Flats to see the Agard family plot at a small graveyard in that community. It's very old, going back to Revolutionary times. Looking at this area, I noticed that there used to be a wrought-iron fence around the plot. The gate had been removed, and there's word that the fence will be rebuilt at some point.

## **O ur Time Is Limited Upon This Good Earth**

There were some very old monuments that go back to the Revolution, and in the back, right against the back edge of the Agard's little plot on the edge of the cemetery, there were two markers with literally nothing left of their inscriptions. Age, wind, rain, and time had done their work, and the names were no longer discernible. This reminded me of an old Jewish saying that everybody dies twice: Once when your physical body dies, and then when nobody speaks your name ever again. We could not say those names on the two little markers because we had no idea what they were.

There's a fantastic scene in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, considered to be on the top five list of poignant scenes in that movie series. There had been battles and wars and more battles and more wars, and then the big one was yet to come. Everybody was fearful. And there's a conversation between Frodo and Gandolf in which Frodo says, "I wish it need not have happened in my time." Gandolf replies, "So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us."

## **W**hat Shall We Ourselves Do With the Time Given to Us?

The rest of this sermon is simple. The Number 1 commandment in the Old Testament is love. The Number 1 commandment in the New Testament is love. The Number 1 commandment in virtually all the world's religions has to do with love. A distant Number 2 is to be a decent person. Number 1 across the board, through the ages, is practicing the art of love — God, the world, the neighbors, ourselves, those who go in and out of our lives during our pilgrimage.

Let me fill out this idea a bit because love is like a mental construct. Everybody has their own idea of what that is. It has to do with our emotions. It has to do with our mind. It has to do with our heart. It has to do with our spirituality. But actions go with fine thoughts. It's not just a mental construct. Without actions, it's not real. Kindness, compassion, forgiveness, living gracefully — these are natural actions associated with the mental and spiritual construct that we call love, and they're cyclical.

Another Jewish concept on this subject is that, if you don't have love in your life, do those actions. Be compassionate, be kind, be

forgiving, be gracious, and love emerges out of it. It's a cyclical kind of thing. You have the mental, emotional, and spiritual construct, and then the physical actions that go with it, cycling around. One of the beautiful things about it is that the cycle spills out into others all the time.

## **R**edeem, Restore, Reconcile, Reconnect, and Reunite

Now, just as though we're in some factory, we're cranking out widgets. You crank out that cycle, love and actions to go with it, over and over again. You keep turning the crank, and it produces widgets. I'm going to call what it produces the "Re's." It's a Latin prefix that means "again." For example: "Redeem." "Restore." "Reconcile." "Reconnect." "Reunite."

Whatever has been severed, whatever has been broken in two, whatever used to be whole and isn't anymore, you take the love, you take the corresponding actions, you turn the crank, and you get Redemption. You get Reconciliation. You get Reunited. You get Restoration. You get Reconnected. The "Re's." Love comes with actions. It goes round and round in our lives and then produces these consequences, Reconciliation, Redemption, and the others.

## **A**nother Cycle Out There: Fear and Anger and Violence

There is another cycle out there, a competing cycle, and it's composed of fear and anger and violence. It also works in a circular nature. You take fear, it produces anger, leading to violence, which then leads to more fear. You take anger, and violence is produced out of it, which instills fear. You take violence; it makes people scared, leads to anger. It's a cycle. It goes over and over again,

each begetting the other, producing once again what I would call the “Dis’s.” “Dis” is a Latin prefix that means “away.” “Dissention.” “Distrust.” “Disunity.”

So we have two alternative models, each with their natural, inevitable consequences.

In my mind, I’m standing in a cemetery, looking at old, old worn markers, asking the question, “What are we to do with the time given to us?”

*Thank you.*