

St Thomas and St Thomas of the Air Church
 Fourth Sunday After Easter
 May 2, 2021
 rmceely+

“...sundry and manifold changes of the world”

“with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning”

“filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness”

*“receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save
 your souls.”*

Phrases from the Collect and Epistle for today.

My, Couldn't the Elizabethans turn a phrase.

Perhaps at first blush

there may be no obvious relationship among these phrases, but,
 perhaps in them we may find instruction for our lives.

We live in a broken and fallen world.

Our society is becoming secularized
 at an ever increasing pace.

We live in a culture of filthiness
 and a superfluity of naughtiness.

It is a challenge these days
 to retain our faith in the
 sundry and manifold changes of the world.

Today an invisible microscopic cell

A virus

Has wrought monumental change in our lives.

Today some of us gather in this little miracle church

And we come together on video screens

Here and across the country.

History is something we live every day
but which can only be seen from the distance of years.
We think of ours as a life of changeable times
and they are,
A virus has certainly changed the way we live
Far longer than many had anticipated.
Going on 14 months now.

But lest we feel that we suffer alone
or that ours is a new phenomenon;
for comparison,
let me tell you some of what an earlier generation
experienced in their lifetime:
Let me tell you something of the story of my Grandmother.

She was born in 1891 and lived just short of 90 years.

During her lifetime:

Transportation went from dirt roads and horse drawn wagons to
concrete freeways and gasoline powered cars and giant trucks

Aviation went from the very first powered flight at Kitty Hawk to
men walking on the moon

First Radio and then television dawned and radically changed
everything

She saw and suffered the loss of two world wars
And two Asian Wars

Four presidents died in office

Prohibition came and went

Income tax came and then exploded

Women voted for the first time in these United States
and went from home bound child raisers
and domestic chores
to all the professions and heads of commerce

By some estimates, a different virus killed a third of the planet

The Constitution of the United States was amended 9 times

Victorian morality gave way to vulgarity and wantonness

Laws that mandated racial segregation were stuck down
and were replaced with civil rights

A young widow at 38, She brought 5 children
And a terminally ill husband
through the Great Depression of the 30s

As a child, she literally lived in the Church with her father the
rector and her mother.

As a girl she had known of personal acts of charity
to friends,
family
and to complete strangers.
The Church was the safety net

But during her lifetime, that life of giving,
was replaced by a cold, giant
federal and state
bureaucracy
that became a very poor substitute
for her individual and personal acts
of Christian charity

During her lifetime, even her beloved Episcopal church,
 the church of her priest father
 and her priest grand father,
 was heretically altered

The point is not that these changes were all good
 or that they were all bad for her.

It is that historians may someday say that no generation in the
 history of man saw more
 fundamental
 life shattering
 change than did my Grandmother's.

Not even the generations of today.

It is difficult to imagine any aspect of her life that was not rocked
 by the *sundry and manifold changes of the world*, in the span of
 her life.

But through all these changes my grandmother remained
 steadfastly a woman of God. Since her death I have wondered how
 she did it.

With the winds of change howling through every aspect of her life,
 however did she do it?

How in the world did she keep her focus?
 what did my Grandmother have
 and what to we have to cling to?

What was there in her life
 and what is there in our lives,
 that is a refuge,
 an anchor
 that we can absolutely rely upon
 to keep us from being swept away and destroyed by the
sundry and manifold changes of the world ?

Consider St James and today's Epistle (which I must say is the delight of all lay readers)

"... (the) perfect gift from above . . . with whom (there is) no variableness, nor shadow of turning. . . Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

The engrafted word of God that is able to save our souls.

The Engrafted word.

In St John's Gospel for today,

Jesus himself expands upon what we know
as the engrafted word
in his final discourse to the apostles
gathered in that upper room
on the night in which He was betrayed:

"... I will send Him (the comforter, the Spirit of Truth) unto you. He will guide you into all truth and He shall take of mine and show it unto you".

Now, my Grandmother had something of an advantage over us,
she was the daughter and grand daughter
of fine priests
and she was literally raised in the church,
living in the rectory in her formative years.

But, we too have the gifts of God,
as St James reminds us in today's epistle.

Gifts

in which there is no variableness
Gifts with not even a shadow of turning

Gifts which are the rock,
the anchor to which we can hold
and withstand a hurricane of change.

We have the Holy Spirit engrafted in each of us.
 The Holy Spirit who will take from Our Lord and show it
 unto us.

Sometimes in the din of this broken world
 We must be still
 and know that He is God,
 in order to hear His voice
 We have scripture, the inspired word of God.

Here in San Francisco
 Perhaps the world capital of our fallen world
 With the moral decay eroding our brethren
 And institutions around us
 We can feel isolated and alone;
 Feel that we are the only ones left
 To stand up for the moral code of God
 But we are not alone.

Without knowing it, or thinking about it
 The love of God
 So alive in the people and children of God
 Spreads and grows each year.
 No. We are not alone.

As the seeds of world war were sprouting in Europe in 1936, T.S.
 Eliot wrote the words that Archbishop Morse posted on the
 Seminary Chapel for all of Berkeley to read:

“The Universal Church is today, it seems to me,
 more definitely set against the world
 than at any time since pagan Rome.
 I do not mean that our times are particularly corrupt,
 all times are corrupt.
 In spite of certain local appearances,

Christianity is not
 and cannot be within measurable time, “official”.
 The world is trying the experiment of attempting to form
 a civilized
 but non-Christian mentality.
 The experiment will fail;
 but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse;
 meanwhile redeeming the time:
 so that the Faith may be preserved alive
 through the dark ages before us;
 to renew
 and rebuild civilization,
 and save the World from suicide.”

So on this beautiful
 Spring San Francisco
 Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Wyoming, New York,
 Virginia and North Carolina morning;
 as we concern ourselves with the prospect of the specter
 of the sundry and manifold changes of the world

Hear the words of Thomas Cramner in today’s Collect
 Hear the words of St James in today’s Epistle
 “The Father of lights with whom is no
 Variableness neither shadow of turning.”
 And
 “Receive with meekness the engrafted word
 Which is able to save your souls.”

Hear the words of TS Eliot;

Hear the words of the Son of God:
 “When he the spirit of truth is come
 He will guide you into all truth”

And as we suffer the manifold changes of the world
Know this:

We have the Church.

Its sacraments

Its doctrine

Its guidance

Proven over centuries of change

And unlike some of our brethren,

We have Anglican doctrine in APCK

Which will not change

to fit our passing political or social opinions.

Rather,

our lives change

to conform to God's commandments.

All of this

and more

are gifts from God to keep us focused.

All of it points us toward our incarnate Lord, Jesus Christ.

So when the winds of change

howl through our lives

as they inevitably will

We have only to grasp onto

The rock

The anchor of our soul.

The engrafted word of God

The Holy Spirit indwelling in us

Seek refuge in the Church

And it will all point us to our Lord

As the winds of change knock us down
 We will rise up again
 As glorious children of God
Firm in our faith
 and ever emboldened
 in our belief
On that narrow pathway to God
 And to life everlasting