

Eight Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. James Lee Walker

7-30-06

Earlier this week I was doing something in my house and had the TV on to the news as I often do when I am working and puttering around. They were reporting on something that was happening in the Holy Land in the Middle East with the fighting that is going on. But something that the reporter said that was kind of irrelevant to the report he was making really caught my ear. He said something about the intensive coverage the news media was giving to the situation. He said that CNN had sent 80 additional journalists to the Middle East to cover the current situation.

Now, my little mind works in strange ways and goes off on these Byzantine thoughts. And, when I heard that, the thing that I thought of was 80 additional journalists, in addition to the journalist normally stationed there by CNN. I'm not really sure what kind of facilities CNN has in Jerusalem and Beirut and other major cities. I imagine they have a substantial new staff with a support team and in addition they have sent 80 more. When you consider the office staff and the people who drive the new trucks and the additional journalist, this probably is a 1,000 people covering the new for CNN in an area that probably could be defined be a 200-mile radius around say the City of Jerusalem. I got to thinking about gosh that's just CNN. What about ABC, NBC and the BBC and the Arab press and all the attention on a worldwide level that's going there or to Afghanistan; or to events in South America; or wild fires in Benedict Canyon over in Los Angeles?

When I was growing up watching the news was a very different experience. I grew up, as I've said before, in Baytown, TX. Now I think, I'm trying to remember but I think we had 3 channels. I think we had NBC, CBS and ABC. Later we got a UHF channel. But when you turned on the evening news there was the same man, sitting in front of a bland curtain on a black and white screen. And back in those days every once in awhile the camera would pan a little to far and you would see the end of the curtain, and behind it you would see the mop bucket and the ladders and the other stuff. And every once in awhile, they did not have wireless mikes, you would see the mike come down on the boom at the top of the picture. But, what was really interesting is the new coverage was about Baytown, TX. Now we were only 30 mile from Houston, so we got a little Houston news too. But, it was very much local in its emphasis, unless another world war broke out we rarely

heard anything from Europe or overseas. When it came time for the weather report, and I just loved this now when we have satellite photos looking down and we are getting the temperature from Antarctica and places like that. But, back then the man who gave the weather report was the same man who gave the news. He would stand up and walk over to an easel that had a large blackboard. Permanently painted on the board was an outline of the State of Texas. And listed there were Houston, Baytown, Austin and Dallas. Those were the only ones written there. And he would give us the temperature for Austin and Dallas and Houston and Baytown were the same. If you lived in Baytown, Texas you really didn't need to know the temperature anywhere except Baytown, Texas cause you weren't going anywhere else. I got out; I'm one of the few. That was it. I remember the first time that I watched TV after I was well into my late teens, and they told me what the temperature was in London, and I was absolutely astounded. One, that I would need to know, but two, I sat there and I went, "Wow, the world has gotten so technological that they can find out what the temperature is in London and tell me about it in America in just about a couple of minutes. That is all it takes. And the world began to grow more interconnected and smaller, and news began to cover a lot more than just what is going in Baytown, Texas. And you know when I was a little kid the world seemed so simple and organized. Everybody knew his place, and everybody knew what to do. I got up and went to school. All of the men in the neighborhood went to work, and all of the women in the neighborhood went to the kitchen and started cooking, and that's the way it was. It was just simple and ordered. And I also picked up books, and looked at books. It was to me sort of like the world is the way God made it. My grandmother was a Southern Baptist, and I would get teaching during the summers that read the Bible, and the Bible will tell you that the world was created in a little longer than five thousand nine hundred years ago, and the mountains that you see today look exactly like they did six thousand years ago when God created them. And they will look just like that at the end of time. But then I began to find out about things like tectonic plates push up mountains and form them, and the rains come and wash the mountains down over millions of years. And there was a time when the planet earth did not exist, and one day billions of years from now our sun will go super nova and our solar system will cease to exist. I grew up as a child with everything in place in order. You could depend on terra firma; the ground of the earth was a solid place to live. It was the way God made it, and then I moved to Los Angeles and found out that the earth isn't that solid. It moves underneath you. And it isn't just the earth that quakes. It's our social institutions, our government, our culture,

and our traditions. And what's scary about it is that some of the stuff that needed to be shaken up and questioned was there. We had practices and things that we did, things about institutionalized racism and gender roles, things about children who have no rights and were mistreated. There were all sorts of things that needed to be changed, but there were other things that seemed very good that changed. I mean that I grew up as a white, middle class male, and it was kind of fun ruling the world. And that's what it was if you were a white, middle class male when I was born, you were in charge. And then I began to realize that was rather sad because the viewpoint, the perspective and the experience of white, middle class males is very, very limited, and the world is much longer. I was an Episcopalian. I was used to being made fun of because of, "Oh, that snooty Episcopalian church; it's the Republican Party at prayer." You've heard all those kind of things being said. What an astounding moment it was in my teen age years when I discovered the Anglican Communion, and found out that I was a racial, white minority in a third world church of people of color. And that where our church is really growing and really thriving is not in Europe, or not in Canada, not in the United States, but in Africa and in the third world. My world began to come so unglued. I look around today and I see people so desperately trying to make order out of a rapidly changing world. It was hard enough to figure out Baytown, Texas, but to figure out the entire planet and to discover that we are but a speck of dust in a galaxy filled with hundreds of billions of stars among hundreds of billions of galaxies, that we come and go in a flash of geologic time. I read church publications sometimes today. I read one not long ago; it was a question written into someone at the Vatican, and I'm not picking on the Roman Catholic Church. There are as many examples as I could give from Baptist to Episcopalians, but this one was such a classic example. It was a person who was genuinely troubled and had written into the question and answer column in the newsletter saying that she had seen a deacon in her parish standing at the altar with his hands in the arouze position instead of in the clasped position. And she wanted to know if this was acceptable or not, and she got a two page typewritten response on just how unacceptable it is. And I sit there and I thought to myself, "The world has bigger things to worry about than what the deacon is doing with his hands as long as they are above the altar, I'm sure." Now I can tell you things, I got one from my bishop back in Fort Worth, Texas years ago with nuclear war with aids, with famine throughout the world, with the environmental crises, with all these other kind of things. His front-page article in the clergy newsletter was that he would no longer accept priests celebrating with their stoles in the straight position, which is

limited to bishops. They must always in the future be in the crossed position, which is proper for priests. I have worn mine uncrossed ever since I read that. What I'm trying to say to you people is that the world is a little more unsettled to us; it seems like, than it was many years ago. During the Middle Ages music, art, culture, architecture remained virtually unchanged for a thousand years. Oh yes, Marco Polo introduced things from the East, the Gothic architecture was introduced in cathedrals, but essentially if you look at the Middle Ages, things were unchanged. The songs you learned as a child were the songs you sang all of your life and which you sang at your funeral. But today when you learn a song as a child, by the time you are five years old the new children are learning new songs. And it used to be that music was part of our culture that held the generations together, singing the cultural and native songs around the village campfire. And now when you open your mouth and sing the songs that you know it identifies you as just being one narrow little segment in the generation gap. Things are so unsettled and so upside down. I remember when I was a kid and would drive to church on Sunday morning, Oh my goodness, if you went down the street on a Sunday morning and saw Mr. Jones mowing his lawn, everybody in the car would just gasp, "What kind of person has Mr. Jones become? It's Sunday morning and he is working instead of going to church." We were shocked at the idea that people would stay home on Sunday morning instead of going to church. And now when people ask me that I run into at a party in Los Angeles, "Oh, so what did you do this week-end?" "I puttered around the house on Saturday and went to church on Sunday." "You did what? You went to church? You believe all that stuff?" People will ask me sometimes, "Do you read the Bible?" And I'll say, "Yes, I read the Bible." They'll say, "What did you read this week?" Well, I'll say something like, "Well, I was reading about Moses leading the people through the wilderness in the desert for forty years coming out of Egypt and going to the Holy Land. And they will look at me and they'll say, "Why did you read all that ancient stuff? What does it have to do with today? We've got real problems today. We are aimless and directionless, and we have no one to lead us, and we are like sheep that are lost without a pastor or a shepherd, and we are like people wandering in a desert. Why do you waste your time reading the Bible?" And what people don't understand is, the story about the exodus isn't about a little peninsula in the Sinai made up of sand. It's about the eternal story of every human being in every culture on their pilgrimage and on their way to God, and so lost without that pillar of fire or cloud or that shepherd to lead them. And whether they were walking on foot in ancient garb or whether they are out there driving in circles on the 405 wondering

what they are going to do with the rest of their lives, people get lost in the desert. And I need more than my limited mind to be able to find my way back to where I am supposed to be. I can't do it alone. I've got friends here on my staff, Patricia and Michael and so many others that help work with me. And, the people that are seated in front of me right now to help me that I can turn to. And it's not just you. There are people who came at 7:30, people that will be coming at 11:00. There are people at churches all over the Diocese; and there is the Baptist; and the Presbyterians; and the Lutherans; and there are the Jews in the synagogues; and the Muslims in the in mojeves. There are all these people that I can turn to that are part of our team. Part of the pilgrim people working together sometimes for a God that do not even know by name. And I can expand my group even farther than that. Throughout the Anglican community and Christendom around the world. And I can expand it back through time. I can depend on Michael as my friend, and Patricia as my friend and I can depend on Moses and his wisdom coming down through the ages.

The collect says today "Increase and multiply upon us your mercy. That with You as our ruler and guide that we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not the things eternal." People if you was to come in here every Sunday and talk about which way I'm wearing my Stoll: or how I'm holding my hands. And some of you do, I hear the gossip. Well I'm not going to complain if that's what you want to talk about. You are really wasting you time. It's sort of like going to Paris and someone says, "You must see the Louvre." "You've got to go see the Louvre it's the greatest art collection in the world." And so you walk down the river Seine and there's the building and you say, "Okay I've seen it." And turn around a go home. Not until you enter it; and participate in it; and live with it; and study it; and know who the artists were; and talk to the other people who come to share the beauty. Then you can say I have begun to open my eyes. I have begun to see the Louvre.

The same with church. Are Bible is not just a bunch of old stories. It is a collection of people interested in the same problems that face us today, just dressed a little differently. And they had there own way of looking at things and they broaden are perspective. So what I am saying is, please keep coming. But come and dig as deeply into this rich treasure as you can. I really mean that.

So that God may increase in us His mercy. That with God as our ruler and guide, we may so pastor the things temporal that we lose not the things eternal.