

I just read an article describing the “Top 25 things vanishing from America.” It’s an intriguing list of things that are already gone or rapidly disappearing. According to some folks who follow such things, the top 25 things that are vanishing are: pit toilets, yellow pages, classified ads, movie rental stores, dial-up Internet access, phone land lines, Chesapeake Bay blue crabs, VCRs, ash trees, ham radio, the old swimming hole, answering machines, cameras that use film, incandescent bulbs, stand-alone bowling alleys, the milk delivery person, handwritten letters, wild horses, personal checks, drive-in theaters, mumps and measles, honey bees, news magazines and the family farm.

Some of this is alarming, like the farm, wild horses, honey bees and blue crabs. Other items on the list we’ll miss in a nostalgic way, like the milk delivery person, handwritten letters, the old swimming hole. Some other stuff — well, good riddance. I won’t miss mumps or measles, and I am tired of dealing with the VCR. Then there are other things that **should** vanish from America that are not vanishing and that show no signs of vanishing any time soon. Like a bitter political campaign season that lasts for 12 months, reality TV shows, methamphetamine, traffic, pollution, crime. Poverty should disappear. Homelessness. Hungry children. These things should have vanished a long, long time ago.

Thousands of years ago the apostle Paul expressed concern about that which was not disappearing in his day, and should; as well as that which was disappearing — and shouldn’t. So in the letter to the Colossians, written when he was in prison in roughly 60 AD, Paul laments the ongoing presence of some things he wishes would disappear. He lists: animosity, strife, greed, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, slander and abusive language. There were false teachers in this community that were claiming to possess superior knowledge of divine matters. So he is writing to tell them that some of these ways would be harmful to their life together. They would never grow into the likeness of Christ with this sort of behavior.

Likewise he argues that some essential Christlike virtues should never disappear, things like joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, humility. Above all is love which “...binds everything together in perfect harmony.” And finally, writes Paul, be thankful and demonstrate your gratitude by singing hymns of praise to God.

Paul is saying that it is really our choice. We can decide what qualities and habits we are going to allow into our lives, and what qualities and habits we will work hard to keep out. To a very large extent we determine exactly how we will live, either by following the values of the world or by following the path of Christ, by living in fear or living in faith.

Maxie Dunham is a Christian minister and author, tells of a place in Death Valley known as Dante's View. From this perch, you have a stunning choice of views. You can either look down 200 feet to the lowest spot in the continental United States, a place called "Black Water." Or you can look up to 14,500 feet and see Mount Whitney -- the highest peak in the continental United States. From this one spot, you can choose to feast your attention on either the lowest or the highest. That is always our choice in life, isn't it? Deciding where to feast our eyes, our hearts, our hopes, futures. It is our choice.

Elsewhere in another letter to the Philippians Paul wrote, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious and excellent and worthy of praise, think about these things." (Philippians 3: 8-9)

Now these days I realize that it is a challenge to stay positive and focused upon what is good, pure, lovely and worthy of praise. Not only because of the depressing election season, but this economic season is beyond depressing. We are all watching our future security become compromised, and wondering what more can possibly happen. These are very frightening and challenging times. But it is precisely in times like these that we need to remember that our true treasure ultimately is not found in things that will pass away. Our true treasure is found in our relationships, the love in our lives, our ability to be a blessing, and our faith.

Now it's true that certain things are vanishing in America and all over the world. Every 20 minutes another species on earth become extinct due to the destruction of 1200 acres of forest. Some things are being lost which will never be replaced, and it is a tragedy. Yet I was relieved to see that among all the things listed as vanishing, the Christian church is not on any such list. I was reminded just this past week of the line in that liturgy we recite which says "The church is of God and shall be preserved until the end of time." Jesus said that even the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The church will not pass away. The timeless truth of God loving us in Jesus Christ will continue to touch generation after generation.

Jesus did not seem to be too worried about his values and legacy continuing because he knew they were of God. He knew people would long for a connection with the divine and therefore his teachings would survive. As long as there were humans on this earth they would long for hope, faith, love, eternal meaning beyond this life.

Now it's true that in some locations the church is dying. Some churches are not reaching new generations and not adapting to a changing world. There are faith communities that are closing or will soon be closing. But elsewhere in the world, the message of God's forgiving love is flourishing and taking hold with new generations. As long as people acknowledge that there is something and someone greater than themselves, as long as babies are born and people fall in love and get married, as long as people get into trouble and try to improve themselves the church will survive. As long as people get sick and suffer and die. As long as people long for something beyond their own understanding and knowledge, to give them peace and a path through the challenges of this earthly existence, the church will survive and flourish.

Now some of us may actually miss cameras that use old fashioned film and drive-in theaters, but I do not think we need to worry about the church pulling a vanishing act. The church and what we offer to the world is here to stay. It offers things that this world will never give and values things that the world does not value. And on this World Communion Sunday we are reminded of the truly global nature of the Christian church.

I love the first Sunday in October, partly because our Worship Team makes it so special with these wonderful breads from all around the world. But I also love it because it reminds me we are a colorful and truly international family. So today my heart is warmed as I think of the Christians I met in Israel who will come to this same table today, the Christians I met in Poland and Belarus and Guatemala, who will come to this same table today. Christians in Kansas and California, Africa and Albania, people separated by time and distance are coming to the same table today. Although we are different in so many ways, we have the same hopes, fears and dreams, worship the same God follow the same Lord, and partake of the same sacrament offered for our salvation.

Today, more than ever we recognize that we are one world, and what affects us in one place affects everyone in every place. The blessings and problems in this world are deeply interrelated from wealth to poverty, war and peace, human rights and economics, everything is interconnected. In the last book he wrote, Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote about a world house in which we much learn to live together, black and white, easterner and westerner, Christian and Jew, Protestant and Catholic, Muslim and Hindu. He wrote that we can never again pretend to believe the illusion that we live apart, therefore, we must learn to live together in peace.

So World Communion Sunday celebrates the world house in which we live, a house in which we are closely connected to our brothers and sisters. It also celebrates the timeless truth of God's presence with us and within us, something which abides and endures. I am thankful that some things that will never vanish from this world, like Jesus Christ and his radical message of love, hope, and abundant life.

As we prepare to come to this table that cuts across all boundaries and divisions, know that you are most welcome. You do not need to be a member of this or any church, or even be a Christian, to be welcome at this table with us.

Let us read Responsively our Unison Confession that will be on the Screens....