

7-30-2017

Can Eternity Stand the Test of Time Sermon, delivered at Fountain Street Church on July 30, 2017

Arend D. Lubbers
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

ScholarWorks Citation

Lubbers, Arend D., "Can Eternity Stand the Test of Time Sermon, delivered at Fountain Street Church on July 30, 2017" (2017). *Presidential Speeches*. 279.

https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches/279

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Presidential Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Can Eternity Stand the Test of Time?
Fountain Street Church Sermon
By Arend D. Lubbers
July 30, 2017

I have a friend dating back to kindergarten who sends me Christian tracts. He was raised with Jesus present, especially on Sundays just as I was, but he claims he really found Jesus as an adult. When I took exception to the message of one of his tracts and suggested that the mind as well as the heart can be helpful in reaching conclusions about what matters theologically, he was not persuaded, and the tracts keep coming. He discovered while I keep discovering. Professor David Gilbert in a Ted Talk stated, “Human beings are works in progress that mistakenly think they are finished.” That’s closer to my view. My friend and his wife, as a result of his successful insurance business, go about the world doing mission work offering a variety of good deeds and casting Bibles about. Could they qualify as works in progress?

I was raised in the Reformed Church with its Dutch Calvinist heritage. It was our family’s religious home since my great grandparents immigrated to America, even though we know one of my great grandfathers was christened a catholic. My parents were well educated and loving. Fortunately for me, nurture was more important to them than doctrine. That understanding and priority held by my parents is the greatest influence in my life. It is the source from which all flows in my consciousness. It may even color to some extent those deep subconscious motivations in all of us that are now being studied by social psychologists. I find my traditions still shape my view of human nature. Human beings at this stage of evolution are imperfectable. I am not so keen on our anthropomorphic description of eternal life that permeated not only my

tradition, but most of conservative Christianity. Live a good life and heaven is an extension. Live a not such good life – watch out. Eternity is our extension of time.

We all have our stories. They all begin without consciousness of their origin. We all have our ego to control and calibrate. If we do not, understanding of life will be unavailable to us. Our ego and physical bodies provide our individuality and it is difficult not to give overriding credence to that individuality, to act only in its interests, to judge others negatively who might impinge on it. Yet as we have evolved, we have learned and our scriptures have recorded that our self-centeredness must be overcome if our spirits are to be nourished. Perhaps Parmenides, the Greek philosopher, has the best formula for ego control. He did not believe in beginnings and endings, only in one timeless reality. He is said to have written, “There is just one thing and I am not it.”

A controlled ego grants others rights to the understanding their stories provide; agreement is not required, nor is reticence about where your story has led you. There is a virtue that makes this work. It is humility, not an inferiority complex type humility. It is recognition that your journey has taken you to a place of belief. Others are in a different position from yours. Who is right? Given the human condition, you must allow for the possibility that your truth may not be ultimate, yet you must act on its premise. You hold your belief with humility. I may be presumptuous, but I might suggest to St. Paul that hope, faith, humility and love, these four, but the greatest of these is love.

You might ask, “under what condition would I take up arms and fight?” When a personal or collective ego would try to deny me my beliefs and interrupt my journey and that of others.

I listened to an interview of former Vice President Joe Biden. The interviewer asked personal questions about death in his family and about his being read the last rites of the Catholic Church when he suffered an aneurism. In his answer, he talked about his commitment to the Catholic faith. He told stories about liberal friends who wondered how he could believe all that stuff. I and many of you would be among those liberal friends. Yet I respect where he is and I see meaning in the symbols of his religion. He is where he is and I am where I am. Our religious journeys are different. I don't claim superiority. I claim I must be where I am because of insights that are opened to me. Judge not and take the beam out of your own eye first before you attempt to relieve others of theirs. I'm trying and it's hard.

Coming to the end of part one of this sermon, I conclude the following:

1. Accept ones past beliefs and experiences without rancour, even if it has taken an emotional toll to do so. Often past experience requires overcoming unfortunate conditions.
2. Belief can be firmly held and acted on even when accepting the limitations of your ability to perceive ultimate truth. This is a paradox we live with and as the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr said, "we come closest to the truth in the paradox."
3. Our ego's cause the greatest problems. Time and space confine our lives, and we have to make our mark in a limited period. To do that, it is easy to push our way at others expense, to talk about ourselves most of the time, and undermine so we can advance.

My friend from kindergarten is actually helping people who need it. He has that right. I wish he weren't hedged in by a fundamentalist theology and right wing politics. I will try not to be too severe in my judgement when his next tract arrives.

When I was ten or eleven years old on Saturday mornings, a friend or two and I cased the alleys downtown in Pella, Iowa to find soft drink and beer bottles that we could turn in for cash. If we had a good day, about thirty cents would be secured. The local movie theater matinee cost ten cents. Each Saturday there was a short subject before the feature. We were more interested in the short subject entitled "Flash Gordon." Flash Gordon traveled in space to the moon and mars. Our imaginations went with him. They allowed thoughts beyond the limits of our Sunday school theology. We didn't think that Flash Gordon adventures could happen, but we wanted them to happen, and now they have. Man has walked on the moon. Is mars close behind?

The scientists, the proof deliverers, have transformed what was imagined into reality. There are three discoveries that have altered my thinking. The question of what lies at the end of our universe is being answered: another universe, many universes. There are planets by the hundreds that are similar to ours. The second discovery is that time ends at the rim of black holes. The black holes in our universe swallow up burnt out stars. Our astrophysicists I am told, do not know exactly what is in black holes, but they have a hunch. The third development is String Theory, the mathematicians approach to reality. String Theory points to the possibility we are living in a dimension of which we are unaware. Quantum Physics, a field that probes the particle world, hints the same.

Our lives are made up of beginnings and endings. Our space is cluttered with them. It is difficult for us to visualize a universe with no limits. We have a hard time contemplating that time does not exist, yet scientists have found a place where it does not, beginning to prove what Einstein contemplated. Our species has lived in the same dimension since the beginning of human

consciousness. We have come to assume they are our reality. Now we are not so sure. If new dimensions are part of our reality, will further evolution make us conscious of them? Will they affect our sense of time and give us new glimpses of eternity?

Each century in the past seven or eight has brought transforming events and thoughts in human life. The 21st may step up the pace. There is the first proof that time does not exist everywhere. I asked the question, “can eternity stand the test of time?” If time, as we are beginning to discover, is only a dimension of physical life, then when that life ends, its time dimension ends. Time which applies to everything in our lives here is unlikely to exist in eternity. If time is not all encompassing as it is for us, eternity is all that time is not.

I offer these thoughts in the humility I defined earlier. The discoveries of the last half century in many areas of life are so astonishing, forcing new understanding for all who do not need traditional securities. The Book of Revelation is not the final word, though it may hold eternal truths, nor is what we are discovering and understanding. So what are we to do? I will conclude with my thoughts which are not new. They come from the canon of human insight and are quite simple. I will read from a memoir my cousin wrote for his children. He quoted a commencement address by Professor Saunders at Syracuse University.

“One useful thing you can do with an old person is ask...“looking back, what do you regret?” Here’s something I regret...” and he describes his failure to be kind in 7th grade to a little girl who joined his class. “Small, shy, she wore these blue cat eye glasses that, at the time, only old ladies wore. When nervous, which was pretty much always, she had a habit of taking a strand of hair into her mouth and chewing on it. Mostly ignored,

occasionally teased. Sometimes I'd see her hanging around alone in her front yard as if afraid to leave it. And then, they moved. That was it. No tragedy, no big final hazing. Now why do I regret that?" Saunders wonders aloud. "Why forty-two years later, am I still thinking about it? Relative to most other kids, I was actually pretty nice to her...although it's a little corny, and I don't quite know what to do with it. What I regret most in my life are failures of kindness." Saunders concludes noting that kindness is hard and that standing in its way is "a confusion in each of us, a sickness, really, selfishness." Then he adds, but as you "err in the direction of kindness, you will discover that luminous part of you that exists beyond personality – your soul if you will – is as bright and shining as any that has ever been."

Recently a friend who dwells much on the spiritual world gave me a book entitled "Never Letting Go" by a Florida lawyer named Mark Anthony who is also a medium. He describes how he conveys messages from spirits to those whom they love and want to help. Their world is enveloped in love and not judgmental according to the author. I don't know what to make of it, but I like the message. The scripture of our heritage defines God as love. Nothing new or startling in that, but upon reflection, love works best for living in every age whatever the thought changing discoveries. Love stands the test of time, and I think love may be the substance of eternity. "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, and let your souls brightly shine."

Scripture Readings

Matthew 7: 1-5

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye: and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brothers eye.

Ephesians 4: 1-5

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Revelation 21: 1-4

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

And I John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.