Full disclosure: this sermon began in a small AA meeting. Someone in the meeting made a familiar, well-worn 12-step program comment: “This too shall pass.” Of course the phrase is as well known outside the meeting rooms as within them. I’d heard it countless times before. It’s one of those sayings about which you’ll hear someone say, “As it says in the Bible . . .” but, just like “God helps those who help themselves, it doesn’t appear in the Bible at all.

So “this too shall pass” was floating around in my head as I began to look at today’s readings. That floating presence probably caused me to underline a sentence from Ezekiel: The Lord God says, “bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.”

And in Second Corinthians: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Finally, I underlined Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed. While not exactly the same thing—more about growth, but growth is change. He tells his listeners that the Kingdom of God is about growing and flourishing.

So, I obviously read these passages of scripture through the lens of “this too shall pass.”

With a little help from the internet I explored the origins of the saying: Sufi poets in medieval Persian. It came to the attention of the Western world through the work of Edward FitzGerald, a 19th century British poet and translator. But the real credit, at least in United States, goes to another 19th century man of letters. He was speaking to the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society. In final paragraph of a fairly tedious speech he said,

It is said an Eastern monarch once charged his wise men to invent him a sentence, to be ever in view, and which should be true and appropriate in all times and situations. They presented him the words: *"And this, too, shall pass away."* How much it expresses! How chastening in the hour of pride! -- how consoling in the depths of affliction! "And this, too, shall pass away."

That man was Abraham Lincoln, speaking to a group of farmers at the state fair, and to give him his due, he did go on to say in a positive vein that he hoped the saying was not *quite* true, as by the best cultivation of the physical, intellectual, and moral world we shall secure individual, social, and political prosperity and happiness “which, while the earth endures, shall not pass away.”

For our purposes today, however, we take to heart those passages about the high being brought low and vice versa. It is the nature of life on earth. I believe, with President Lincoln, that there is an upward spiral to human civilization and progress. But along the way we often find ourselves wanting to cling to certain moments of joy or elation—a wedding, a birth, a promotion, a child’s smile—only to see it pass, as it must. Just as surely we sometimes want to run from situations of grief or anger or shame, and we are relieved when they pass.

Echoing the theme of last Sunday’s sermon, we both long for change and fear it.

I’m not fond of a pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by view of heaven. I prefer to think of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, as something present here and now, as our Lord himself spoke of it. Our calling as Christians is both to discern that presence around and within us and to collaborate with God in bringing it to the fore. And Paul does drive me a little crazy when he goes off on his dualistic toot about the evil body and the heavenly spirit. However, I believe a key to living in the world as God would have us do is summed up nicely in the opening of this passage in his letter to the Corinthians: “We are always confident . . . for we walk by faith, not by sight.”

Knowing that now, in this moment, “This too shall pass” (including this sermon, you might be thinking), our path as Christians is illuminated by God’s grace, and we trust that as all things pass, God’s love is constant and never failing.”

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