



**St. Andrew's By-the-Sea**

*The Episcopal Church  
in Destin, Florida*

**THE SEVENTH  
SUNDAY AFTER  
EPIPHANY**

**FEBRUARY 23, 2025**

**A Homily by the Rev. James J. Popham**

A few church's back, at coffee hour, a member of the congregation in a voice loud enough to assure everyone there could hear, called me the worst priest he had ever known. ... "You're the funny guy," he said, dripping with disgust. I assume he was unimpressed by my sense of humor, which often was on display on Sunday, in the announcements, and even in the sermon. Just let that sit for a moment. We'll come back to it.

Jo and I have been musing lately that we have lived in the best of times. Born shortly after the second world war, raised by parents that had known the depression and the hardships of war...like the rationing of sugar, coffee, and rubber. Indeed, the rationing of sugar ended only the month before Jo was born. But we heard their stories and the sacrifices they made. And say what we might about the sixties, with the Viet Nam war and the trifecta of political assassinations, we witnessed the passage of landmark civil rights legislation, to say nothing of Medicare and Medicaid.

And into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, notwithstanding a recession here and there, we indulged in a typically strong and surging economy, trips to the moon, and an amazing array of advances in medical care and communications and computer technology. Imagine a camera that can tell you the current temperature anywhere in the world. \_\_\_ degrees right now in Moscow... Idaho.

Back in the day, we may have had nightly news from only three television network news, but we trusted them to be reporters and journalists and editors with objectivity and integrity. Now instead of Walter Cronkite, Huntley-Brinkley, and Edward R. Murrow, we have social media. So today 39 per cent of young adults get their news primarily from Tik Tok and 31 per cent of adults of all ages regularly get news from so-called "news influencers" on social media. No vetting, verification, or checking of sources. What possibly could go wrong?

The best of times do seem to be behind us. Anxiety levels are spiking. It's as if we are living the Kingston Trio's Merry Minuet:

They're rioting in a Africa  
 they're starving in Spain  
 there's hurricanes in Florida  
 and Texas needs rain

The whole world is festering with unhappy souls  
 the French hate the Germans the Germans hate the Poles  
 Italians hate Yugoslavs, South Africans hate the Dutch...  
 But we can be thankful and tranquil and proud  
 That Man's been endowed with the mushroom shaped cloud  
 And we know for certain that some lovely day  
 Someone will set the spark off and we will all be blown away

They're rioting in Africa  
 There's strife in Iran  
 What nature doesn't do to us  
 Will be done by our fellow man!<sup>1</sup>

Now before we gather our courage and turn on even the traditional broadcast and cable news programs and channels, Jo and I are compelled to say the following prayer from Rabbi Irwin Keller:

My God, the soul you have placed in me is pure and vulnerable. I am afraid that looking at today's news will be painful. Encircle me in a robe of light so that I can witness the wounds of the world without being wounded myself. Let me learn what I need to know in order to be of my greatest use, without being overwhelmed by despair. I feel your protective light now as I open myself to the world's suffering and the world's joys.

And we find the remote and press "on."

Psalm 37 can speak to the anxiety that plagues us as we survey the world around us:

Take delight in the LORD, \*  
 and he shall give you your heart's desire.

Commit your way to the LORD and put your trust in him, \* and  
 he will bring it to pass.

He will make your righteousness as clear as the light \*  
 and your just dealing as the noonday.

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<sup>1</sup> Kingston Trio, "The Merry Minuet" By Sheldon Harnick, ...from the Hungry i, Capital Records,1959

Be still before the LORD \*  
and wait patiently for him.

Do not fret yourself over the one who prospers, \*  
the one who succeeds in evil schemes.

Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; \*  
do not fret yourself; it leads only to evil.

The Psalm may have been written in circumstances different from ours. But the message is clear and applicable, regardless of the hardships the writer or reader may be facing. And uncertainty, whether about the fate of the world, or the future of our nation, or even where we will meet a few months from now or a few blocks down the road, provokes an anxiety that can wear us down.

Psalm 37 can speak loudly to us as we acknowledge and cope with uncertainty of where we will be worshipping when our church is sold. Of wondering whether our mission and ministries can continue. Of pondering what St. Andrew's By-the-Sea will look like in a rapidly evolving culture that seems to be leaving the church and religion as a whole in the dust of its pursuit of a very different and confusing and often threatening future.

In the weeks and months and even years ahead, we will make a multitude of decisions about the location, mission, ministry, and direction of St. Andrew's by-the-Sea. We will consider all sorts of possibilities and options and approaches to church, mission, and ministry in a changing world.

But we can assure ourselves that every idea, proposal, strategy, approach, methodology, or plan for discerning our future as St. Andrew's rests on the same foundation...us. Ourselves. Our souls. Our hearts. Our minds. Our bodies. Ourselves.

All we need to be is ourselves. Ourselves as authentic followers of Christ. Because the younger generations can sniff out bullshit in a heartbeat. And they will walk in the door and walk out even faster. But when they see us love our neighbors. When they see us love our enemies. When they see us respect the dignity of every human being. When they see us strive for justice and peace. When they feel our genuine love for them. They will never leave.

And we know they will feel that love. Because we know it is here. It is genuine, authentic. It is touching. It is inviting. It is real.

So back to that coffee hour a few years ago. Once my ego had healed, I realized something very important. Yes, my sense of humor can be a liability at times. But when God called me to ordained ministry, God called me as who I am. God knew as well as my children, that my sense of humor could be lame. But it's part of me. It's part of the me God called.

And each and every one of us is called by God in this moment of uncertainty not as some shining saint, but as who we are. And that's who God wants us to be. So let's not worry about who we are.

In the coming months, we will take many steps down the road, metaphorically and actually. Uncertainty will be our companion. Certainty will be a blessing.

And all the certainty we can muster right now is that as long as we are your priests. As long as Russell is our bishop. As long as we remember who we are. On the Sunday after we sell this building and depart this sanctuary, and every Sunday thereafter, we will gather together for our Sunday worship. And you take that to the bank along with the proceeds of the sale.

So let's not worry at all. Let us embrace the wisdom of Psalm 37.

Be still...be patient... refrain from anger...leave rage alone...do not fret yourself.

Commit yourself...trust God... trust yourself...be yourself.

Never forget that one of God's greatest gifts to us is...ourselves. Because - we know you, and you are amazing.