

“May God give us blessing, and may all
the ends of the earth stand in awe.” AMEN!

“If you could be your 16 year old
self all over again,
what would you change?”

That question led the interview
by Mary Louise Kelly when she spoke
with author Mary Straub about her new book,

“This Time Tomorrow.”

Mary Straub wrote the book,
which deals with time travel, during
the pandemic lockdown of 2020.

A time when she (like most of us) grieved
not being able to go to her favorite public
places because they were all closed for safety.

On top of that grief, she was also dealing
with her father in ICU and her inability to talk
to him and share the things she’d

wanted to share with him in case he died.

So she wrote this book as a kind of therapy,

to go back in time when dwelling in large
crowds didn't present Covid risks and
(more importantly) to have

the conversations with him in
the younger days. (Pause)

Beloved, I was struck & moved to share this with you
at the front end of today's sermon because
when I consider the question about what

I'd change if I could go back to my
16 year old self, I often think of fixing
my career path, taking school
more seriously, starting to save for
retirement earlier, or

the famous, "I wish I knew then
what I know now!"

A statement that always
gets the wink and the nod.

But I realize, that those "fixes" are pretty childish
after hearing this interview.

Mary nailed it when she said she'd
not necessarily want to change
anything like these,

but to go back to the kitchen table and
listen more and participate in
the conversations more;

to notice (and relish) “Jeopardy!” on
the t.v. in the background of family time
and to dwell the moments that don’t seem

like much when you’re growing up
because you’re “living them every day,
and [then you grow up and] you realize
it’s the everyday stuff you’re
going to miss.”

It’s the everyday stuff that we’re going to miss...

How much grace would we give ourselves
if we recognized, like Mary, that we don’t
need to change anything about our
young selves?

To know that we were the person
we were supposed to be and
on the step to becoming who we are.

And becoming whom one is,
is the underlying theme of each text today.

Experiences and examples of people
becoming who they are.

Paul's vision in Acts telling him
to go to Macedonia, why?

To become who he is.

The baptism of Lydia and her household,
moving her to be who she is.

A prevailing example of hospitality, fellowship
and welcome.

Then in John's gospel, we read how Jesus
gives his blessing of peace as he closed out
his final discourse to the disciples;
his last words to them as a group.

“Peace I leave with you;
my peace I give to you.”

They, too, are becoming who they are.

They don't need to look back at
their past regrets anymore.

They didn't understand it at the time,
but later they'll remember and

come to see what they'd missed.

What they missed is what we miss sometimes.

That this peace from Jesus
met frightened disciples and His peace didn't
remove the conflict.

Instead, it planted a seed of "unworldly" peace
that would seem small but it would grow
to "a profound and holistic sense of
well-being."

It is the same peace; the same *shalom*
that Jesus would breathe upon them
in the upper room, after the resurrection.

The kind of peace that the world cannot give.

The kind of peace that reminds us
to become who we are. (Pause)

On occasion, I'll be called to preach
a sermon in a funeral home chapel.

There's various reasons, but usually it's
because the person was not a part of
a worship community while they were alive,
but the family wants to have a service

to help in their grief and aid in the healing process.

And that's ok, I will always perform
that action of service.

Funerals, memorials, and celebrations of life are
meant for the benefit the living not the dead,
but if truth be told, I'm never comfortable in
a funeral home chapel.

It's not because I'm away from the "home court"
or that the funeral home staff is inhospitable.

They are most often very accommodating.

Most clergy are not comfortable preaching in
funeral home chapels because they are meant
for one purpose and that purpose
is associated with death.

But the church building is associated with
all aspects of life: Weddings, baptism,
confirmations, pot-lucks, picnics,
choir rehearsals, Bible/book studies,

meetings of all sorts including outside groups,
and (of course) for worship.

Churches are also associated with death,

since it is a part of life, but death is
not its sole purpose.

In all its variety and splendor, pain and grief,
the “church reminds us that the story of Jesus
was more about life than about death.”
(Karl Jech, “Channeling Grace”)

And since Jesus is about helping humanity
become whom we are supposed to be,
that should be a mission of the church, too. (Pause)

Siblings, we are living in dark times.

We cannot sugar coat what is happening
in our nation and in the world.

Nor can we deny that evil exists, even in the church.

The Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III spoke of the way
the church must be at work “to fill in the void.”

Not the building but the people.

“The void is a problem in America” and
the church (as a whole) has stumbled
to fulfill her role in helping humanity
become who we are supposed to be

because the church has ceased to become
what its supposed to be.

Some self-inspection is necessary.

Churches have opted to talk about saving souls
for the afterlife while sacrificing
the oppressed in the present life.

“Has anyone dared to deliver the truth
that is so hard to take, so painful to hear,
that it makes you want to kill them?”

That’s exactly what Jesus did to the religious
establishment and the power brokers of his day.

He spoke the truth that was
so hard for them to take,
so painful for them to hear, that
they wanted to kill him.

This same Jesus, beckons us to follow Him and
dares to breathe peace upon us at the same time. (Pause)

“Yesterday cannot be tomorrow.” Let yesterday go.

Peace cannot be the absence of conflict,
not if we are becoming who we are.

Beloved, hear the good news.

When everything looks to be its darkest and
when it looks like everything's dying and
it feels like we are in a tomb, then look up.

For the "darkness of the tomb may be
the darkness of a womb" and behold we'll
see God making all things new!

The river of the water of life, the tree of healing,
and the Lamb promise God's
gracious presence...

In, with, behind and in front of you!

No lies, no loopholes, no gotcha's... only life.

This process is our becoming.

AMEN!