

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel awoke one morning to read his own obituary in the local newspaper. It said, "Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in war than ever before. He died a very rich man." It was Alfred's older brother who had died; a newspaper reporter had mixed up the two. But the account had a profound effect on Alfred. He decided he wanted to be known for something other than developing the means to kill people efficiently and for amassing a fortune in the process. So, he initiated the Nobel Prize, the award for those who foster peace. Nobel said, "Every person ought to have the chance to correct [their] epitaph in midstream and write a new one."

In the Church, this is the time of year when we talk about the end – final things, Christ's second coming, and judgment. We spend a number of weeks on these subjects, because the Bible treats them with utter seriousness. But this isn't simply an intellectual exercise, or playing around with puzzle pieces of Biblical prophecy—this becomes personal. It becomes personal when it occurs to you that your end may come before The End. In either case, you may want to do what Alfred Nobel did – "to correct your epitaph and write a new one."

Have you ever thought about that? If you were to write your own obituary, what would you say about yourself--apart from the typical dates and family details? And what if you were radically honest in this obituary, and listed not only your accomplishments, but your failures? If you wrote down those you helped and hurt, those you thrilled and those you disappointed, what would it look like?

Jesus reminds us today in the gospel that even the most beautiful and the most awesome things of this world come to an end. The temple in Jerusalem was by all accounts a marvelous building; a masterpiece of craftsmanship. But even this magnificent structure, Jesus said, will come to an end. And it did. The Romans crushed Jerusalem in 70AD and completely dismantled the temple. The reality is that there is not a never-ending supply of tomorrows for anything or anyone.

So. Where is your life heading? What has been happening in your relationships with the people in your family? Have you shown as much love and care to them as you know you should? What has been happening with your friends? Have you given them the time and attention they need? Where you are at this moment in your relationship with God? Do you trust Him? Do you have a real sense of peace knowing that God is ready to help, guide, and support you?

How forgiving a person are you? Most importantly, is the good news of Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection the power source for your heart? Or, in truth, are you drawing from another battery?

I'm not telling you anything new when I say that the most beautiful and the most awesome things of this world come to an end, including us. At that moment, only one thing will count, and it's not your job, or your bank account, or how many people follow you on social media; and it's not even that you tried not to hurt anyone and would give a stranger the shirt off

your back. All that will count is whether you have made the fundamental trust of your heart the fact that Jesus lived, died, and rose for you.

Let's work on that eulogy, shall we? I would hope that it would tell how you leaned into Jesus when the going got tough; that you confessed boldly, "Jesus is my Lord and Savior;" that you made time for worship and prayer. I would hope that your loved ones would be able to reflect on how you cared for them, encouraged them, showed them Jesus, prayed for them, enjoyed life with them, and walked honestly alongside them.

I hope that when it comes to that day, your funeral would be a celebration of your entrance into eternal life. I hope that those who gather on that day will experience an inner peace and joy knowing that Jesus died for you and that you trusted in him for forgiveness and eternal life, and that will be of special comfort to those who are feeling empty and alone because of your departure.

That day when Jesus was leaving the temple with his disciples, he gave them a lesson on how temporary things in this life really are. He spoke of the unthinkable – the destruction of that incredible house of prayer. Our place in this world is even more temporary than some of the things we build. However, there is a permanent home waiting for you in heaven. It is truly home, as we heard last Sunday—because our Father God is there, with His Son, our Savior and brother, and the Holy Spirit, reigning in glory, surrounded by both angels and every redeemed person.

In the meantime, take to heart the lesson of the fallen temple. Encourage those you love to do the same; to really stop and think about the big picture. Encourage them to explore a deeper relationship with Jesus, because we want them to be there in heaven with us.

I agree with Alfred Nobel. "Every person ought to have the chance to correct [their] epitaph in midstream and write a new one." That chance lies before you today.

*Let it be said of us  
That the Lord was our passion  
That with gladness we bore  
Every cross we were given  
That we fought the good fight  
That we finished our course  
Knowing within us the power of the risen Lord*

*Let the cross be our glory  
And the Lord be our song  
By mercy made holy  
By the Spirit made strong.*

