

We live in a disposable culture. It is remarkable to think about how many things we use in our daily lives that we simply expect will wear out. That we have no problem tossing in the trash.

Little things like diapers. I remember, before our daughter Emi was born, my wife and I were pretty set on using cloth diapers. Because we could reuse them. They would save us money. They wouldn't fill up a landfill with plastic that takes 500 years to break down. It seemed like a great idea.

And then we actually had Emi. And we realized the incredible hassle that cloth diapers are. And that the convenience of disposable diapers was really worth the expense.

We do it with bigger things too, though. Phones, tablets, and computers that cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars are obsolete in a couple years. Appliances that people used to have for a lifetime now rarely last more than a decade. Clothing that would be washed and repaired and altered over and over again in the past, to get every bit of life out of it, we simply give away or throw out and buy new.

Now, I'm sure many of you are thinking this is a bad thing. People of an older generation often lament how disposable our culture has become. But there's a reason why this culture has developed: we like it.

We like having everything disposable. Sure, it can be expensive and frustrating. But it also means we can quickly and easily get new stuff all the time. Those disposable diapers really are more convenient. That new phone will do so much more than the old phone. Those new appliances will have all sorts of new features. Those new clothes will be bright and new and fashionable.

We have a disposable culture because we like to have new things. And that's totally understandable. In fact, I think it might actually help us understand our lessons today. Because our lessons are all about how God likes new things too.

Today, is the last Sunday of the Church year. It goes by many names. Christ the King Sunday is the one I prefer, when we celebrate Christ reigning on his throne on the last day. It's also called the Sunday of the Fulfillment, when we remember the coming fulfillment of Christ's promise to return. Or some people just call it, "Last Sunday of the Church Year." Which itself has meaning, for there's something fitting about reading about the last days of earth on the last days of the church year.

Whatever you call it, today is about the end times. We hear about it in all three lessons to some degree or another. Jesus' words are vivid and rather shocking. The sun and moon will be darkened. The stars will fall from the heavens. The Son of Man will descend on the clouds and send his angels to gather the elect, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. It's an amazing picture.

Isaiah isn't quite so detailed. But the images he uses are interesting. He says the heavens will vanish like smoke and the earth will wear out like a garment.

The heavens will vanish like smoke. The earth is a fire that has been burning for thousands of years. Smoke billowing out of it constantly. But on the last day, it will burn itself out. One last wisp of smoke will rise into the sky. And then it will be gone. Poof. And all that will remain are ashes.

The earth will wear out like a garment. Like that shirt or that pair of pants or those shoes that you wear and you wear and you wear. Until they're finally threadbare and falling apart in your hands. And you have no choice but to toss them in the trash, because there's just nothing left.

Simply put, Isaiah is telling us that the earth, that our entire creation, is disposable in God's eyes. That it will burn itself out like a fire. That it will wear itself out like a piece of clothing. That it cannot last.

But then he really sticks the knife in. Because he says, "*And they who dwell in it will die in like manner.*" We are part of this creation. We are a fire that eventually burns out. We are a garment that eventually wears out. We cannot last.

And if we're honest with ourselves, we know that. Anybody who's felt themselves growing older, knows that. I'm not even 40 years old and I know this body that I live in can't last forever. I can feel it slowly wearing out. And those who are older than me... I know you feel it too. Some of you mention it quite often.

And so we turn to things that we hope will slow that down. Maybe we eat right and exercise. We avoid harmful substances and keep our minds sharp. We go to the doctor and take our medication. But that only delays the inevitable.

Or maybe we just give in to it. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we will all be dead. You only live once. Carpe diem, seize the day. Live in the moment. And try to forget that the day of the Lord is coming. Whether that's the day of our death or the day of Christ's return. But always knowing deep down that it will catch up with us.

Ultimately, neither one is a solution. You can delay it. You can ignore it. But you can't stop it. This world has been wearing out from almost the day it was born. Just like your body has been wearing out from the day you were born. All of creation is full of sin. Your heart is full of sin. And sin ruins everything it touches.

Which is why Isaiah says that our only hope is to turn to one whom sin hasn't touched. To turn to the God who created this world. The God who doesn't wear out. Who isn't disposable, like we are. To turn to him and his righteousness and his salvation.

Isaiah writes, *“My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out.”* A little later, he echoes that, *“But my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.”*

But it's interesting. In Hebrew, the phrase “my salvation” is the word “y'shua.” It's where we get the name “Joshua” from. But the Greek form of that same word, that same name, in the New Testament, is “Jesus.”

Which means those two lines, written 750 years before Christ, actually say, “My righteousness draws near, Jesus has gone out.” And again, later, “But Jesus will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.”

Simply put, God told us centuries before Jesus was born that we would find salvation in him. That he would bring God's righteousness to us. A righteousness that cleanses us from our sin. That makes us something more than disposable.

In your sinfulness, you are a piece of trash that God wouldn't hesitate to throw away. A broken appliance. A pile of ash. A worn out garment. A ruined creation.

But by the death and resurrection of Jesus, you are a masterpiece. You are worth rescuing from this worn out world we live in. You are worth sending out every one of heaven's angels. Gathering you from the ends of the earth. Gathering you even from the ends of heaven. Gathering you out of death and the grave, into new life.

This world is falling apart. It is wearing out. And we see that all around us. Every day, you can't turn on the news without seeing the world fall apart a little bit more. Every day, you can't get out of bed without feeling yourself fall apart a little bit more. We're wearing out. We can't stop it and we can't ignore it.

But why are we trying? Instead, let's embrace it. Let's embrace the fact that this worn out world is burning itself out. As it must. But we won't burn out with it. We won't go up in a puff of smoke. We won't wear out like a garment.

We will be renewed. With the fire of God's righteousness and the garments of his salvation. And we will stand beside our Lord in the beauty of his new creation.

Because he is forever. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's Word made flesh will not pass away. Heaven and earth will vanish, but Jesus will be forever. And by his righteousness that draws near to us, we will be forever too. Amen.