

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia
on December 30, 2007 by the Reverend Dr. Richard P. Smiraglia**

Isaiah 61:1-10

Psalm 147

Galatians 3:23-25: 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

Your Salvation is Inevitable

There is a theory in physics known as chaos theory. You might have encountered it. It was famously featured in the movie Jurassic Park, where the entire dinosaur crisis was somehow the result of a butterfly flapping its wings somewhere else on earth. An interesting thing about this theory is that it strikes so many people as absurd. How could a butterfly in Peru have anything to do with me? But, in fact, the theory is very real. Try looking at it this way: instead of thinking that between me and you is nothing but empty space, consider instead that the air between us is really a gas. In fact, it is made up of particles, zillions of them. So, it is rather like swimming under water—when you try to push your arm fast it meets the resistance of all of the water ... if you displace a lot of the water, say by jumping into a swimming pool, then the displaced water has to go someplace—usually it slops out onto the deck. So, when that butterfly flaps its wings something in the air molecules has to give somewhere. Of course, the reason this theory is called chaos is not because it results in instant chaos everywhere but because it can lead to unpredicted consequences. Because (and this is important), most consequences can be predicted by physics. The reason millions of butterflies have nice lives and never destroy anything is because there is plenty of give and take in the universe—so there is plenty of room for wings to flap without chaos.

Some people think God is like a puppeteer, and we are all like marionettes, and God is pulling our strings all the time. It is a satisfying way to think about God because it soothes the ego. “God sent me a taxi” I learned to say when I lived in New York and got a cab even when it was raining. “God saved my life” is more like what we usually hear, and it usually means that God pulled the strings just in time to move the person out of harm’s way.

As I said, it is a nice idea because it soothes the ego. It makes us think that we—each individual one of us—is important enough to warrant God’s undivided attention.

But God is more like physics. God is not only the cause of creation, but God is in creation and is the constant and eternal source of creation. God is in the air right here, and the system is perfect because God is in it. So when the butterfly flaps its wings the whole thing works out because God designed it to do so. What does this have to do with the baby Jesus? I will try to explain.

In the beginning was the Word. All things came into being through the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. No one had ever seen God. It is God the only Son who has made God known. The child Jesus, born in a stable in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, virtually homeless in a time of great crisis, is the true revelation of God. In this very human even, God is revealed utterly to us. In this human event God is revealed eternally for us, that we might see and believe that we too are the children of God. It is all part of God’s plan from the beginning, that we should see God revealed. It is all inevitable, that God should be revealed in this way. From the beginning, this sequence of events is set into motion. From the beginning God ordained the motion of revelation that continues to this day. It is all inevitable.

So what does that say about you and me? It means, our salvation, is inevitable. Salvation is inevitable. God has already made it so. It makes no difference how many cracks in the sidewalk you step on. Your salvation is inevitable. Well, except, you must believe in it to be able to see it. “To all who received his name ... he gave power to become children of God.” You must receive this revelation, in order to realize it. Did you ever walk around in a fog because you were preoccupied? It is that simple. If you are not attentive to your role as a child of God, then you simply might miss out on your own, inevitable, salvation.

Well, then, if salvation is inevitable why should any of us behave? Because, that is how we create God’s kingdom among us. The kingdom, as Jesus will often say, is here. The problem is, we either cannot or will not see it. And this affects the course of human life. You can bring the kingdom here now. As I often have told you, just look each other in the eye, and whatever it is you were going to say

... don't. Smile instead. Remember, your salvation is inevitable. And so is his.

This is the message of the continuing revelation of God that begins with the birth of the child who is the Christ. God directs the action of the continuing revelation of God's incarnation in that homeless child two thousand years ago. But God does not direct it like a puppet master by pulling strings, God makes it so, because inevitably it must be so. And the same is true with you and God. Did you ever wonder what God has called you to do? Did it ever occur to you that whatever it is you are doing is what God has called you to do? Do you have a nagging sense you need a change? That is God calling you, inevitably, to your place in the universe, so that when the butterfly flaps its wings God's will will be done through you.

Sing the praises of God because inevitably you are saved. Rejoice in the Word made flesh who lives among us, because you, too, have a place in God's plan. Amen.

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