



## See and Hear:

### Canadian Reflections *on* the Ethical Imagination of The Saint John's Bible

<sup>29</sup> I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, <sup>30</sup> and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, <sup>31</sup> and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

*1 Corinthians 7.29-31 (NRSV)*

January 24, 2021

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B



## Word & Image

Read alone, this brief passage is a little startling. One is given the impression that Paul is essentially urging us to give up on this world - advising us to throw away our marriages, become callous to the suffering of others and practice a miserable asceticism. Why would he endorse such behaviour? It seems this is all justified because, well, the world is going to end soon anyway. Standing alone, these words are certainly not an overly inspiring staging of the Second Coming.

Like all texts, however, there is a larger context to consider. In reading from the beginning of the chapter until the end his letter to early Christians, it is evident that Paul is employing hyperbole to make his point. Paul sees in their social behaviour a spiritually unhealthy obsession over small and petty differences among them. What he calls them to is a much more expansive ethical imagination to life as a Christian community, an imagination fundamentally shaped by a transcendent hope in the Resurrection (see 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the epistle).

When I look at the handcrafted page of the Saint John's Bible on which this passage is written, I become curious about the meaning of the small details in the mind of the artist. These illuminations are so subtle that we might overlook them as insignificant. However, they influence the way our eyes move back and forth between the text and the spaces in between, reminding us to pay attention to the 'whole page'. This is precisely what Paul is asking his listeners to do, to live with a greater imagination of what the future holds. Let us not be defined by the small things, urges Paul, but what ultimately matters.

## Spirit & Action

- What image within the many Gospel stories captures your imagination? Return to that image. Contemplate its details. Visualize yourself within the story, or image. How do you see it differently?
- How do you see *yourself* differently as a result of visualizing yourself within the image?
- How will you continue to bring that image of the Gospel into your present life? In what way can your imagination of the world around you be transformed by this Gospel image?

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