Ready or Not

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1 Corinthians 3:18-23 (NRSVUE)
Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. [19] For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," [20] and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." [21] So let no one boast about people. For all things are yours, [22] whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, [23] and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Imagine waking up one morning and discovering that the person who wrote your news article, answered your doctor's question, designed your child's homework, composed the music you're listening to, and made the photograph you're looking at was not a person at all. You might not even know the difference. That is the strange moment we have arrived at. We are beginning to live in a world where things that once required a human mind—writing, creating, reasoning, recognizing, deciding—can increasingly be done by machines. And the remarkable thing is not simply that this is possible. It is how quickly it has become ordinary. Just a few years ago, much of this sounded like science fiction. Today, we carry it around in our pockets. So perhaps the question is not whether we are ready for this new world. Perhaps the more unsettling question is: what if the new world is already here, whether we are ready or not?

If that kind of creative capacity sounds too far-fetched to you, you should know that the first paragraph of this sermon – everything I said between the prayer and the sentence I just started, was written by ChatGPT. I asked it to create the opening paragraph of a sermon, based on our scripture lesson and the title, with only a few sentences of an abstract I wrote for our internal planning. ChatGPT did the rest. I also want you to know that it is the *only* part of this sermon that was written with AI. No sermon I have *ever* written or ever *will* write will be done by AI. I do my own work, as I believe everyone should. But those boundaries aren't as fixed as we once might have imagined they were.

One of our roles at Church of the Saviour, in addition to being a deeply committed faith community, is to be a reliable source of trustworthy information about the world. So, part of the goal in this series is to help us be better informed. We want to be guided by faith, not fear.

AI is everywhere. Even if you don't think you use it, there is a good chance that you do. If you have a smartphone, the caller ID that tells you an incoming call is from an unknown number is using AI to compare the number to your contacts and previous calls. If you send text messages or write email on your phone, the predictive text suggestions as you write are AI generated. Photos you take on your phone are tagged and organized using AI to recognize faces and situations.

Do you use social media? The algorithms that make social media work are all driven by AI, and they determine what shows up in our feed, what ads we see, even suggest friends on the platform. When you look for something on the internet, the browser you use suggests how to complete what you're typing in the search bar. If you shop online, both the things you purchase and the things you look at are tracked and stored so that similar items can be suggested. Even if you don't shop online, if you use a credit card to make purchases, the data about where you shop, what you buy, and the billing zip code for that purchase is captured and used for marketing purchases, all using AI. The software you use on your phone or your computer most likely has an AI component that promises to help you do what you're doing, make your work more efficient, or suggest new ways of using the program's tools.

Now, maybe you're thinking, "I don't do any of those things. I don't own a smartphone, I don't use a computer unless I have to, I'm not interested in social media." Great. Do you check the weather forecast on television or elsewhere? Because most weather modeling is now done using artificial intelligence to predict weather patterns and analyze the data that leads to the forecast you read or watch. Cameras using facial recognition systems powered by AI are used when you board an airplane and to monitor people attending an event… or just walking down the street. The electricity grid that powers your home is metered by AI to determine how much power is being used, how much power should be produced, and where it should be distributed. Your doctor is most likely using AI to make notes about your office visit and analyze your test results. Even the closed captions on your television are generated now using AI.

Before we go any further in exploring AI and what it means for us, it may be helpful to define what we're talking about. AI stands for *artificial intelligence*, a broad term to describe computer systems that are designed to mimic human intelligence and learn from data. *Machine learning* or ML is when computer systems use algorithms to analyze data and track patterns over time to perform tasks without specifically being programmed to do so. *Generative AI* studies existing information available to create new, original content. *General artificial intelligence* (AGI) is a system that can match human intelligence to perform essentially any intellectual task a human can. Depending on who you ask, we're either very close to having AGI or it's already here. *Superintelligence* or ASI will surpass all human intelligence in every category. Some experts predict that computer systems will achieve ASI within the next decade.

Earlier generations of AI would respond to prompts by mining data from the internet, copying sentences, paragraphs, or entire articles verbatim, often without any citation whatsoever. This generation of AI works differently. Today, AI models study patterns in data, blog posts, news articles, scanned books and periodicals, websites, images, and videos to create its own content. That's how ChatGPT created the opening paragraph of the sermon – not by stealing from another sermon on this topic, but by drawing from patterns and answers and stories from trillions of sources. It produced that paragraph in about two seconds. And I could have done the same thing using Claude, Gemini, Copilot, or Grok. Open-AI launched this week its newest version, GPT-6 Astra, which shifts from continuous user prompts to independent agent execution of multi-step workflows on its own.

This might sound like it came from the imagination of Isaac Asimov or Gene Roddenberry, but the technology has been in development for years. And science fiction often predicts actual science. We don't have flying cars like the Jetsons, but we do have Waymo. And while Rosie isn't cleaning the house, a robot did just break Usain Bolt's world record in the 100-meter sprint at the World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing. I'm personally holding out hope for the replicator from Star Trek to save me time in the kitchen and the grocery store.

Tristan Harris, co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology, has said that AI "dwarfs the power of all other technologies combined."[1] Bigger than the printing press. Bigger than the Industrial Revolution. Bigger than the discovery of electricity. Bigger than the telephone, radio, television and the internet…combined. That's because AI is involved in nearly every field of study and practical application today. So, if you advance artificial intelligence, you're advancing every technology at the same time. Neural transmissions in the human brain travel about 30 meters per second. But the speed of light, which is how computer processing works using fiber-optics, is about 300 million meters per second. As technology continues to advance, computer processing is expected to far outpace the limits of the human mind. But all of that advancement comes with risk.

We used to think that machines would take away jobs like this (robots working on assembly lines). And they have, in some instances. But the AI revolution looks more like this (large data centers and tech trillionaires). Dario Amodei, the cofounder of Anthropic, predicted in 2025 that AI would wipe out half of all entry-level white-collar jobs and cause unemployment to rise between 10 and 20% in the next five years. He has since walked back from that prediction, though at the time he referred to the anticipated job loss as a "bloodbath." And though the first AI revolution will automate mostly white-collar jobs, it will eventually

become sophisticated enough to automate physical labor – even highly complex and delicate processes that require real-time decision making. Machines don't get paid. They don't complain. They can work around the clock without needing rest. If they are cheaper, more efficient, more productive, and more profitable than the human workforce, of course companies will use them.

At the same time, AI has brought tremendous breakthroughs in technology, engineering, and medicine. We can perform infinitely more complex math than ever before. Structures can be designed more lightweight and durable, capable of withstanding earthquakes and extreme weather. AI is largely responsible for our capacity to map the human genome. Through advanced imaging and analysis, it can detect tumors and blood clots and pathogens. AI assistants can free people from tedious tasks to invest more energy into new ideas and new developments. It could give us more time to spend with families and achieve better life balance.

There are many people at many levels predicting what all this change will mean. AI will either bring about the end of the world, or it will be the gateway to a better life for all of us. The reality is likely somewhere in between. But as with any technological development, our speed of advancement outstrips our ethical reflection about the technology itself or how it will be used. We fall into a pattern of thinking that if we *can* do something, we *should*.

Whether we see this moment as exciting or terrifying – or both – we should not be fatalistic, as though whatever is going to happen is inevitable. We are not passive bystanders in the world, but active participants in shaping the future. And our faith informs us. Obviously, you won't find anything about AI in the Bible. But the scriptures are *filled* with stories about unexpected disruptions and major life changes. Abraham was called to leave the land he had always known in order to become the father of many nations. The Israelites were freed from captivity and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years to reach the Promised Land. The disciples huddled in an upper room, but the Spirit sent them into all the Earth to proclaim the Gospel. And the story isn't just that our forebears left the known for the unknown, but that *God was with them every step of the way.* And that promise is for us, too. God will never leave us nor forsake us. Our 2026 Myers Forum scholar, Elonda Clay, who will be with us in a few weeks, put it this way: "Do you know who is not surprised by AI? God."

But how should we live in this moment? The subject of AI is so big, so complicated, and it continues to develop at a rapid pace. It does seem inevitable. We can't put the genie back into the bottle, even if we wanted to. So, what should we do?

We begin by educating ourselves about artificial intelligence and how it is used. We don't have to be experts. Make even a modest effort to be informed. Knowledge is power and we play a part in shaping our future. Don't assume things are what they appear to be.

AI bots are used to create fake messages purporting to be someone real, often someone you trust, but are schemes to get you to hand over sensitive information or money. Have you received an email or a text that turned out to be a scam? We all need to be more aware and vigilant about cyberfraud. If it sounds too convenient or too good to be true, it probably is.

We should also think critically about our engagement with AI. Are we using it to make our lives simpler, or are we just using it to avoid doing something we probably should be doing ourselves? If we use it to create something to share, are we disclosing that we used AI or are we passing it off as our own work? Are we using AI to create more opportunities to interact with others, or does the way we use it avoid relationships or damage them?

What is the cost of having this technology? I don't mean the cost of a computer or using a paid AI service versus a free one. I mean, what makes the technology possible? Who does it benefit and who does it harm? The data centers that drive AI capacity are garnering a lot of attention, much of it negative. Where are they being built? Who is building them? How many jobs do they create? How much electricity do

they require? How much water do they use? What impacts do those things have on the people who live around them? Who gets to decide?

The Bible may not speak directly about AI, since most of it was written two to three millennia ago. But it does have a lot to say about honesty, integrity, justice, wisdom, and responsibility. And though it's not the popular slogan it once was, it's still a good idea to ask, "What would Jesus do?" Let's be guided by the faith, not fear. Amen.

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