

“The End is Near?”

Sunday, November 13, 2016

26th Sunday after Pentecost



(Luke 21:5-19, NRSV)

The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, *“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”*

Signs and Persecutions

They asked him, *“Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?”*

And he said, *“Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them. When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.”*

Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.

“This will give you an opportunity to testify. So, make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

“Doom and gloom...The end is Near!”

Oh, my gosh, have you heard the **news**?

Even the cover of **TIME** magazine proclaimed this week: *“The End is Near.”* 

Of course, TIME and Jesus were talking about two very different things.

TIME offers us relief from the most aggravating election season in recent memory.

Jesus is warning the disciples about the destruction of the Temple and the destruction of Jerusalem.

In both cases, I believe there is hope.

“Whatever anyone thinks about the election, the results are in no way *‘the worst thing ever.’* Far from it.

“Whatever anyone thinks about the election, the results are in no way *‘the best thing ever.’* Far from it.

“There are much, much worse things.

There are much, much better things.

“Life is full of change, and much of it is unexpected. Transitions can be **transformational** with God as our Good Shepherd.

“**Hope** is the power that can turn every ending into a new beginning, every finish line into a new starting line.”ⁱ

Hope is all about perspective.

Let us pray...Lord, as we come to your gospel this morning, lead us to understand what Jesus is talking about and how we should hear this message today. In Jesus’ name, we pray. **Amen.**

OK...It is kind of interesting that this particular text comes on the Sunday after what is being called the most historic election in America.

Let me be clear, however, this election is neither the end of the world as we know it, nor is it the salvation of our nation.

It is, quite simply, one more election that ended with some people very happy and others very sad...That is the democratic process in which we live.

And that is all we're going to say on the matter.

Today's gospel lesson comes in the Lectionary near the end of the Christian year.

Next Sunday is Christ the King Sunday and the end of the liturgical year.

What we notice is that this lesson has been taught for centuries, *long before our country existed*.

Every generation of human beings, at some point in its history, has thought the end of the world was certainly near at hand...It is no different today.

We can reflect on experiences of war, natural disaster, and political chaos that seem to point us toward the Apocalypse.

September 11, 2001, began a war on terror that seems to have no end.

December 2004 saw one of the deadliest natural disasters in history as a tsunami hit Indonesia.

August 2005 marked Hurricane Katrina, one of the five deadliest hurricanes in US history.

Recent earthquakes have rocked Oklahoma, other parts of the US, and countries around the world.

Urban violence and racial unrest has sparked countless instances of mass shootings, civil disturbance, and neighbor-on-neighbor violence.

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.”

We can't help but wonder if the time is finally here when Christ will come again and rescue us from all this chaos.

Living our lives with such a mindset really is missing the point of the gospel.

Luke highlights this episode in Jesus' teaching to make the point that the end of all time is not tied to any particular historical event.

The temple may have come to an end, but that is not **THE END**.

Peace may come to an end and be swallowed up by war, but war is not the way the world ends.

Our sense of security may end, swallowed up by earthquakes or hidden in the muck of political chaos, but fear and insecurity are not **THE END**.

People will try to speak for Jesus and misuse his name to claim new truth and divine revelation of today's evils, but the world does not end with truth's impersonators.

Luke goes on to make this very personal by including the warning that *you* will be arrested and persecuted for your faith.

We live in a land of religious freedom so this may be a hard concept for us to understand.

But Jesus is clear that the disciples will be taken before the authorities and forced to testify for their faith.

Jesus promises to give them the words they need to say, at the moment they need to speak.

I think this is helpful as we separate this story, about a specific time in history, from our time when we hear Jesus words within a different context.

Just when everything looks so dark and scary,
when falsehood seems so persuasive,
when war seems everlasting and inevitable,
when the earth trembles underneath your feet,
when you feel forced to explain yourself to
someone, Jesus says you have “*an opportunity to testify*” (v.13).

This was true for the first disciples and remains true for us today – we have an opportunity.

What will we do with it?

Someone once asked Martin Luther what he would do if he knew the end of the world was coming.

He responded: ***“If tomorrow is the Day of Judgment, then today I want to plant an apple tree.”***

When we hear of war and natural disaster and cultural unrest, we have a choice to make.

We can stand on the corner and shout: *“Woe is me, the End is Near!”* or we can *“plant an apple tree.”*

I believe we should plant rather than pluck up what has been planted.

We are not supposed to know when the end is near.

It is not something we should worry about or speculate on; it is God’s job to think about when the end will come.

If we listen to what Jesus says in this passage, we realize that it really doesn’t matter whether the end is near or not.

What matters is who’s in control.

This does not mean that we should ignore what's happening in our world and leave everything to God because ***“God is in control.”***

God does not now, *nor has God ever*, simply stepped into our world and fixed all its problems.

The effects of war, disaster, and civil unrest have always been addressed as God's people co-operate with God.

We are the ones called to be faithful to the gospel message – *“love God and love others, even our enemies”* – This is what it means “to plant.”

There is no guarantee of safety or prosperity in this calling; the promise is that we will endure.


When the world goes to war, we should cry out for peace; when the world does not listen, we keep crying out.

When we see people persecuted for who they are, where they live, or who they love, we must shout ***“Stop!”*** to their persecutors.

When communities divide over issues of this world, we must call for unity as God's people in God's world where nothing matters more than love for God and for each other.

When those around us tell us that the world is coming to an end because this candidate was elected or that ballot question was defeated, we must say, *“No! This is not the end and it is not the worst thing that could happen.”*

Instead, we must bear witness to Christ's unshakable promise.

 What we read today are only words, small breaths of air breathed out millennia ago, but these words endure with power to *“gain your souls”* (v.19).

The Temple was destroyed, but it was not the end.

The Roman Empire fell, but it was not the end.

Jesus' words endure, and their promise is not diminished by earthquake, war, or famine.

They not only promise a kingdom, but they also describe a habitable place here and now.

In the face of everything the world can throw at us,
we will endure because Jesus promises to,
*“give you words and wisdom that none of your
opponents will be able to withstand or
contradict.”*

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

ⁱ Whitley, Mark, *Facebook* posting, 11/09/2016