

Twenty-sixth Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Vicar Paul Eldred

November 13th, 2016

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I think it's safe to say that this has been an emotional week in our country. I imagine many of you were disappointed by the results of last Tuesday's election – I imagine many of you were excited by them too. One thing seems clear to me, after 18 months of campaigning and debating and bickering, our country feels more divided now than it did before.

But it's more than civil disagreement that is dividing us. In the three days following the election, the Southern Poverty Law Center recorded over 200 individual incidents of hateful intimidation or harassment against groups or individuals who happen to be Black, Muslim, Latinx, LGBTQ, women, and more. Hijabs have been ripped from women's heads. People have been told to 'go back' to where they 'came from.' Swastikas and slogans like "Make America White Again" have been spray-painted in public places. The list goes on.

There are even reports of increased bullying in schools against minority students. Many of these incidents appear to be in reaction to the hateful rhetoric that was so casually thrown around during the presidential campaign.

My own social media feed and personal conversations have been filled with friends and loved ones who are members of minority groups and who have expressed fear or uncertainty about what might happen to them in the coming days, weeks, months, and years. I'm sure many of you have heard similar concerns or fears as well. It's a scary time for many people to be living in this country.

And then we come to church this morning, many of us hoping for some good news from Jesus and we get this gospel reading, "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." Not exactly a feel-good text to put on an inspirational poster. This is scary stuff too – an apocalyptic text that seems to foretell the end of the world. But if we look at this text a little closer, I think we may actually find the good news we are hoping for.

Today's gospel comes from the end of Luke during time we now call Holy Week – Jesus is in Jerusalem and it's just a few days before his crucifixion. This is one of the last times Jesus is able to talk to his followers before he is arrested and put on trial. And Jesus is talking to them about the destruction of the temple – the center of Jerusalem and of Jewish life. But for the first audience of Luke's gospel, this was something that had already happened. More than three decades after Jesus' death and resurrection, there was a rebellion in Jerusalem and the Roman Empire was run out. When the Romans recaptured Jerusalem a few years later in 70 CE, they did indeed destroy the temple and much of the city. The Gospel of Luke was written another 15 or so years after the capture of Jerusalem, so for the first listeners of this gospel, this was not foretelling the end of the world but was a

description of something that they knew all too well. They knew of the persecutions that were happening around them. They knew about the betrayal and rejection of friends and family members. They knew how scary the world was around them. Many had likely experienced these things first hand. So Jesus is not predicting will happen, but rather trying to comfort them during these happenings. “Do not be terrified,” Jesus tells them, for I will be with you. I will give you the words to speak and I stand with the persecuted. It is for times like this that I have called you to follow me. Apocalyptic literature generally is not meant to predict what is to come or to frighten the reader, but to show God’s solidarity with those who are suffering and those who feel confused. And we can read this text in a similar way.

Today’s gospel reading is not a text meant to scare us about the future, but to give us hope, and remind us that Jesus is with us even when the future seems uncertain and even when we are afraid. That when human institutions fail us, God is faithful to us and has given us a solid rock on which to stand – that is Christ Jesus. That even though the night may seem bleak, “the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.” Jesus is telling us that even when the world seems to be falling to pieces around us, we can trust in the hope that God is with us.

So where does that leave us, my beloved siblings? How are we to respond to these times in which we are living?

Liturgically, we are nearing the end of our journey through Luke’s gospel. In a couple weeks, we will enter Advent – a new church year and a new primary gospel as we turn to Matthew. But one of the hallmarks of Luke that we have heard for the past twelve months is the emphasis on Jesus’

mission to the poor, the outcast, and the oppressed. Way back in the beginning of his ministry, Luke reports that Jesus declared “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18). This year we’ve heard stories about Jesus eating with sinners, healing the sick, uplifting the widows, and spending time with those suffering under Roman imperial domination. We have heard about Jesus standing up against domineering forces and resisting structural and systemic evils. And as followers of Christ Jesus, we are called to follow in this ministry.

We are called to be God’s presence in this world, here and now. To stand up for those facing persecution or discrimination: our siblings who are Muslim, Black, Latinx, LGBTQ and more. We are called to protect those who face violence or dehumanization. We are called to listen with love and compassion to those who are afraid so we may be Christ’s presence in their lives. Or, using the words with which our new members are about to affirm their baptism, we are called “to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; to serve all people, following the example of Jesus; and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.” Part of these promises and our call as Christ-followers is to stand against racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia in whatever form they may come.

Jesus tells us that times like these are opportunities to testify – testify to God’s love for all people – testify to Jesus’ compassion for the outcast and oppressed – testify to the hope that God is with us no matter what the world tells us. I know that this is not an easy road to walk. The work is hard and tiring and there will be times when we feel like we cannot bear it. But as we

heard in the second lesson, “do not be weary in doing what is right,” my beloved siblings. Ours is a God that stands with the oppressed and who comforts us when the future seems uncertain. And no matter what happens around us, remember Christ is with us.

Thanks be to God.