

Pentecost 26 – November 13, 2016
Wars and Rumors of Wars
Malachi 4:1-2a
Psalm 98
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
Luke 21:5-19
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Fellow ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
Gracia y paz de Dios, Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo.
Grace and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We made it!
We have arrived at Jerusalem. The end of our journey with Jesus.
Here we sit admiring the beauty of the Jerusalem Temple.
And Jesus shatters our reverie.

On Wednesday morning last week, we arrived at the end of another long journey. That morning half the population of our country woke up elated and joyful at the election of the 45th president of the United States. The other half woke up shocked and fearful. The results of this election and the reaction in the days since have revealed, in striking images, the very real divisions at work in our nation. The results of this election have given rise to the question: “What now?” I have heard the question from friends and colleagues, within the church and without.
“What now?”

Tumultuous and uncertain political and social times are nothing new. In this week’s reading from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus and the disciples have arrived in Jerusalem. It is the week of Passover preparations. By the end of the week, Jesus will be crucified on a cross, die and be buried. Jesus’ followers are infatuated with the beautiful structure surrounding them. An edifice of epic proportion, elegance and engineering mastery. And Jesus interrupts their musings to tell of tumultuous days ahead.

It is helpful to know that by the time Luke wrote this Gospel, the tumult and destruction that Jesus described was happening in real time. The glorious Jerusalem Temple was completely destroyed in 70 C.E. Luke writes his version of the gospel around 90 C.E.

It would be easy for Luke’s audience to get caught up in Jesus’ description of the tumult: false teachers, wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes. It is easy for us, in the 21st century to see the signs Jesus is warning about.

My sister often pondered the end times, so did my dad, based on this text.
Wars and rumors of wars? Check
Nation rising against nation? Yup
Kingdom against kingdom? Done

Not to mention the cosmic disasters:

Earthquakes, famine, plagues, dreadful portents and signs from the heavens?

We can add to the list, tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, volcanic eruptions . . .

Gah! We ARE doomed!

But wait, there's more!

Arrests and persecutions of people who believe in Jesus.

Betrayed by family and friends,

even death as a probable outcome of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What now?

It feels like we are in the midst of these hair-raising predictions, asking . . .What now?

In the midst of uncertain and fear-filled days, Jesus says "do not be terrified; it's all part of the plan". Jesus promises to give us the words and the wisdom we need to testify to the good news of Jesus Christ, risen and glorified. In the midst of the chaos, Jesus promises protection and life. These are not empty words. Three days after dying on the cross he is raised from death to prove that the power of God's love and life is more powerful than the chaos, more constant than the uncertainty and able to conquer death itself.

Fifty days after the surprise of the resurrection, the Holy Spirit blows through like a mighty wind giving the apostles those words and that wisdom Jesus promised. Fortified by the Spirit, they take Christ's message of hope and promise into an often hostile world. So, whether you were shocked or elated on Wednesday morning, Jesus' promise is the best answer people of faith can give to the question, "What now?"

Remember that our time of tumult and uncertainty is not unique.

Today, as in previous times of chaos and division, we are called to do what Jesus' disciples have always been called to do: proclaim the Good News of God's love and grace for all people, walk with the poor and the powerless, feed the hungry and heal the sick, work for peace and justice among the broken and the suffering, and pray for the words and the wisdom we need to be the Body of Christ in the world.

The promises of Jesus give us the hope and the courage to carry out this mission.

As I reflected on the results of this election as Wednesday dawned, I was drawn to the word of the Lord spoken through the prophet Jeremiah to the people who had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find welfare" (Jeremiah 29:5-7).

Living in uncertain times raises our collective level of anxiety regardless of the outcome of one nation's election. Jesus the Christ leads us to repentance and reconciliation.

Building bridges of justice, hope and peace in a divided and tumultuous world is our sacred work . . .
Christ's work.

As people of faith, that's what we are to be about... no matter who occupies the seats of power
in our country or around the world.

God is still the God of every nation.

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, still lives among us, full of grace and truth.

Thanks be to God!