

Good News?

Isaiah 12: Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 21:5-19
Proper 28 C St Thomas's Church 2016

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

In the name of God....

Well, it's over...the election anyway...and here we are.

Last weekend as I began working on this sermon,
we listened to Wait Wait Don't Tell Me (NPR) as we often do.

At the end of the show Peter Segal posed the final question to the panelists:
what will you be doing next weekend at this time? Where will you be?

My answer then – and my sermon - bear little resemblance
to where I find myself now.

These apocalyptic words from Luke sound far more prophetic today
than they did before the election.

This is not a happy time – or an easy sermon.

For me even though it can feel like the world came to an end on Tuesday,

I know the sun still comes up in the East and life goes on.

The world may not have come to an end - but something did.

Days later the air is heavy with fear,

polluted with the suffocating smell of eroded trust.

Where is the civil discourse we could always rely on?

Respect and decency, those good manners my parents pounded into me?

We are less likely to listen to each other, more likely to talk past each other.

We have entered what one commentator has called the post truth telling era.

Something has died – and we are going to have to work hard

to find the new life among the grave clothes.

The surreal thing is that

there may have been a near-apocalypse of sorts in our country

nothing in the wider world has changed.

Nations are still rising up against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms.

There are earthquakes in Italy, famines and plagues in Africa and Haiti and Syria

droughts and fires in the US....

In that way nothing has changed...

but on this side of Tuesday's election, for us things have changed.

The veil has been ripped away. What was hidden has been revealed.

Our racist, sexist and class divisions are no longer underground.

They are laid bare for us – and the rest of the world – to see.

What do I say to my black brother Q who shrugs and says on Wednesday

for me it's just another day – it's been like this all my life.

We're just closer to being lynched again.

What do I say to the 10 yr old daughter of my Hispanic colleague who can't sleep –

because she's sure they're going to "come and throw us over the wall."

What words are there for my Japanese god-daughter

who fears for the child she just learned she is carrying,

for her Korean husband who does not yet have his green card

and for herself when she completes her PhD.

My close friend, Muslim and Iranian, has had to get medication

to help with her a fear and anxiety she has never before experienced.

Our gay and trans grandchildren (one of each) are devastated,

disbelieving, angry - and scared for their future.

The wounds opened in the last year and a half
have torn the curtain of our temple of democracy.

The justice we may have dreamed of remains just that - a dream.

Those who are poor, hungry, grieving and excluded
live in a far country from those who live on easy street.

We are a country discouraged, divided, and disgusted.

The precious stones with which our nation was built have been thrown down.

Something important has died and gone down with them.

In today's gospel, when Jesus talked to the apostles
about the beautiful stones of the Jewish temple coming down,
they thought the destruction of their temple
would mean the end of their world.

But Jesus wanted to make one thing perfectly clear.

When these things happen, which they did some 30 years later,
it is not the end of the world.

The end of the world is not yet.

These are only the birth pangs.

And when there are labor pains, new life is coming.

But it was not there yet for the disciples and it is not there yet for us.

So it is important in this post election moment
to take a step back and allow each other the space and the grace
to mourn what has been lost over this long election season.

If you have ever lived through the death of someone you loved,
you know how surreal death can be. Shock, loss, disorientation.

In that moment, outwardly nothing has changed –
the world keeps on about its business as usual - but for you everything is different.

I have a distinct memory of the day after my father died.

I was out jogging, the sun was shining, the sky was blue
and it was blessedly cool – a perfect jogging day.

I was doing what I always did, same old same old –
nothing appeared to have changed.

And yet there was a profound difference in my life.

Something important was missing.

The world was carrying on as if nothing had happened.

But for me everything was different.

Life had changed not ended – but changed for sure.

I needed time and space to grieve.

In the wake of this election, life has changed – even if it hasn't ended.

And we all need time to grieve what was lost in last year and a half.

I wonder if this is what it was like after Jesus was crucified.

In today's gospel reading,

Jesus is winding up his earthly ministry in Jerusalem,

one step away from the events of Holy Week.

The closer he gets to his death, the more controversy he generates.

As he speaks to his followers in today's passage,

Jesus is open about the hardships that lie ahead for his followers.

Just a few short days later – He will be hung up on the cross

a spectacle for the world to mock as he dies in agony.

When it was finally over, some in power were elated.

Among Jesus' followers some were disbelieving, others were angry and afraid.

Trust was gone.

This man hanging there was supposed to be their Messiah,

the one who would save them from slavery and oppression.

Most Roman men and women on the street didn't even notice what happened.

For them it was just another crucifixion.

But for the Jews it was different.

For them, for those who followed Jesus, the world as they knew it ended.

The world didn't end with Jesus's death – or did it?

It looked like “just another death” – but God had other ideas.

And with Jesus' resurrection three days later,

Life changed – but it didn't end. It began anew.

The new heaven and the new earth foretold by Isaiah

began to be glimpsed by all who had eyes to see

The Jews may have been in the belly of the whale

for a time, lamenting all that had been lost,

but now with the death and resurrection of Jesus,

the people of God were being spit up on a new shore.

With the death and resurrection of Jesus

God's kingdom began to be realized.

With the death and resurrection of Jesus

God's people were again shown love in the face of anger

hope in the midst of despair,

the renewed promise of new life when the future seemed empty.

Jesus' word and the promise of God continued to live on

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Jesus it was becoming apparent

that it was not life but death that was running out of time

despair and injustice that were running out of time

because God keeps God's promises

and God's love is stronger than all the forces of death.

Even in a time of catastrophe, Luke's Jesus says,

God's people should lift their heads and expect resurrection.

That is the same message of hope to us today.

God is greater than this moment, greater than all we are or will live through.

God's arc bends toward justice, unity and peace – and that day will come.

If there is a gift to us in this unsettling moment.

And that is to recognize that some of the temples WE have created

NEED to be destroyed

built as they are on the shifting sands of racism/ sexism/classism.

We have strayed far from God and God's commandments

and as church, we have work to do.

To begin, as church we have to admit we have been a partner in landing
in this place of fear and anxiety and despair where we find ourselves today.

As church, we have too often been silent in the face of injustice.

We have wounded others where we have refused to accept
those who are gay, lesbian or trans.

We have not been strong enough advocates for immigrants struggling
to create a new and safe life.

We have lost sight of the God who loved us into being

and God's Son who welcomed the stranger,

ate with sinners,

and lived and died to give us life.

We are in a dark place in many ways.

In all his talk about the stones falling and wars and earthquakes

Jesus is pointing out the dark places.

We need to go THERE –

for it is in these very places of suffering and injustice

that God is to be found.

This election is our call to turn around and turn back to God,

to follow Jesus and come out of the dark tomb of silence

into the light and hope of resurrection.

It is time to reclaim the lost moral compass in our land

We need to stand firm under the shadow of the cross

remembering Christ gave his life for us to expose the powers of evil around us.

We must dare to openly voice our hope in God's presence with us

and God's promise of new life in the Christ who lives among us.

It is by our endurance, by our speaking out for the left out, that we shall be saved.

It is by our refusal to anchor our faith in the beauty

of our man-made temples of privilege

and by our willingness to confront the evil of racism and sexism and white privilege

w/o flinching and w/o looking away that we shall see God.

We are stepping out into an unknown, into what may often feel like chaos.

There are a lot of unknowns out there which may mean we have to do a little improv.

No one has played this tune before in our political scene

or in the life of the church as we have known it.

But we can hear the melody of God's song in the distance

even as the walls come down around us.

You know the words: Seek justice, love mercy, walk humbly with our God.

We need to begin with prayer, prayer I learned when I was 8 yrs old.

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| 1. Take out your right hand | A - acknowledge God |
| 2. A C T S | C - sins of omission and co-mission |
| 3. Your hand goes with you wherever you go | T- for hope & new life in Christ |
| so pray on those fingers. | S – plead for strength, wisdom |

Your hands and fingers are Christ's hands

in this divided, fear-filled, violent world.

Your prayer is radical in the face of all that confronts us.

Your gentleness, your refusal to play with the bullies, turning the other cheek instead,

your insistence on loving your neighbor even as God does

praying for those who hate you and whom you may hate

your reaching past all that divides us -

all this can help change the world.

Love is stronger than death – and only in God will there be peace.

Lament – and pray.

LISTEN to the voices of those left behind.

And then build bridges, advocate, and invest yourself in God's new earth
where justice and mercy reign.

Together by God's grace

we can become the salt and light our world so desperately needs right now.

Hands up for God – and may God be our guide in the days ahead
as we do what we can to rebuild our country.

For Christ's sake. Amen

