

St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA
The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge
Church Year C
11/13/16
Pentecost 26
Luke 21:5-19

Here we are this morning on the other side of the most divisive and polarizing election in recent memory. If you heard last Sunday's sermon, you may recall that it posed a question. "Come Wednesday, how shall we live?" That question is now before us. In the aftermath of a battle that at times felt as if it were shaking the very foundation of our republic, "how then shall we live?"

Jesus and his first followers lived in a time that was even more conflicted and contentious than our own. Living as a people conquered by an Empire, one of their few consolations was the Temple in Jerusalem. A huge and glorious structure, it was the center of the worshipping lives of the people and the primary symbol of their national unity. They understood themselves as one people who worshipped one God whose home was the Temple.

Yet, we hear Jesus telling his first followers this morning that the Temple would soon be destroyed. "Not one stone will be left upon another, all will be broken down." And if that's not bad enough, he tells them that they are going to be hated and betrayed and persecuted and even put to death because they are his followers. But don't be afraid, he says. I'll give you the words to speak. Not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance, you will gain your souls.

In the worst of times, in the midst of the most intense conflict, when it seems as if everything is falling to pieces, and going to hell, don't be afraid. Don't lose heart. By your endurance, by your perseverance, by your faith, by your trust in God's saving mercy and grace, you will gain your souls.

So now let's fast-forward to today. This present moment. Another time of intense conflict. Another time when the symbols of national unity seem to be in danger.

Regardless of how you feel about the outcome of this election, whether you are pleased or disappointed, whether you feel vindicated or filled with despair, we can all agree that we have work to do. Because the fault lines in our culture which this election has exposed threaten to deepen and do even more damage. We as Christians have work to do, and we need to do it together. As one body. The Body of Christ.

We, as a people, are right now in need of healing. We are in need of reconciliation. And it's up to us as Christians, citizens of this republic and citizens of the Kingdom of

Heaven, to be God's agents of healing and reconciliation. And for us to do that, to carry out our agency, we're going to need to get out of our tribes. Left or right and in-between. As soon as we start sorting ourselves into tribes, we start talking past each other. We divide ourselves into us versus them. Yet in God's eye, there isn't any us versus them. There's only us. So we need to begin to see each other as God sees us. And to do that, we'll need to start listening. Deeply listening. Left, right, and in-between. As we deeply listen to another human being, including one who really disagrees with us, we can begin to see beneath the surface. We can begin to see the hurts, the pain, the fears that we all live with. We can also see the hopes and aspirations that may not be so different from our own. As we move deeper into empathetic connection with another human being, we can begin to let go of the need to be "right" and instead embrace God's desire for us, which is to be in "right relationship." You know. Loving God with all our heart, mind, and strength. Loving our neighbor – each and every one of them – as we love ourselves. It's what Jesus called the summary of the Law. And it doesn't have anything to do with being right. It has everything to do with being in right relationship.

Now being in right relationship with someone we don't agree with doesn't mean we surrender our convictions, although, it may wind up causing us to take a second look at some of our most dearly held beliefs. No, we continue to discern God's will for us to act with integrity, and to work for justice and peace. Being agents of mercy — that is being in right relationship — And it also means being agents of God's justice. Now, as ever. You know, there's some scary stuff going on out there. A lot of people are feeling very vulnerable right now. And it is up to us, as Christians and agents of God's justice to stand in solidarity with any person or group who feels threatened or who might be abused or discriminated against. This isn't a left or right issue. It's a human being issue.

So if we want to be agents of healing and reconciliation – meaning if we want to follow in Jesus's footsteps – we will need to become agents of God's mercy – listening to the other, the ones we disagree with – moving out of our tribal boundaries and into deeper relationships which may leave us feeling pretty vulnerable. And we'll need to be agents of God's justice, standing with and advocating for all those who are powerless and vulnerable and afraid.

It's in times like these, times of conflict, times of change, when our faith is most likely to be tested. And it was in times just like these when Jesus told his followers not to look to human constructs and institutions, even the ones that seemed as if they would last forever, for their salvation. The Temple – that symbol of the nation – would fall. But the ones who followed Jesus – who trusted in his word, who practiced his mercy, who stood for his justice – they would never fall.

So I stand before you this morning at this most difficult and conflicted hour, filled with hope. I stand before you to say, don't lose heart. Do not be afraid. As Christians, citizens of this great republic and citizens of that heavenly country, the Kingdom of God, we were made for these times. We have been learning and practicing for just how to meet these times.

I spent three days this week at the Biennial Conference of the National Association of Episcopal Schools. There were gathered more than 700 educators, clergy, and leaders from across the nation and around the world. And there was such determination and hope and faith in this gathering as we shared best practice and wisdom and expertise on how to best serve children and families, how to nurture their intellectual development and form spiritual and moral character. There was no sense of despair or loss, just as there was no sense of triumph or vindication. This was a politically diverse group. No sense of judgement or exclusion. No sense of us versus them. There was just "us."

Just the Body of Christ in all its multiplicity and connectedness. The Body doing what it's supposed to do.

And I have hope because of you. Because of this St. Thomas Community. The Body gathered here. I see a community of awakened and enlivened souls. And there are countless other communities just like ours. Communities filled with souls who are awake and alert. Moving from anxiety into action. We have all been in training with the Lord Jesus for just this moment.

What's called for right now are acts of healing and mercy and kindness and justice. We know we can't fix the world all at once, but we can stretch ourselves to mend that part of the world that's within our reach. Any small, calm, peaceful thing that a soul can do to help another soul to mend some part of our suffering world helps immensely. Positive change will come as each small act of mercy and justice is added to the next and the next, more and more. To work together in places that feel so dark and conflicted is to bring light out of the darkness.

I stand before you filled with hope because I know something that you also know. I know why I'm here and so do you. I know who I serve and so do you. The merciful words we speak and the just and righteous acts we do aren't ours. They are the words and the acts of the One who brought us to this time and this place. Yes, indeed, we were made for this very moment. We, who are the Body of Christ.

Now I would like to invite you to join me in saying the Litany which you have in your worship sheet. This piece composed by Karen & Steve captures beautifully our calling to be God's agents of healing and reconciliation, God's agents of justice and

mercy. Take it home with you and pray with it every day. Let it sink into your soul. Your soul in its deepest parts already knows that there is no “us” versus “them.” There is just “us.” Your soul longs to join with all those other souls in God’s Kingdom coming.

We ask for the grace to be the voices of comfort, compassion, justice, unity and love, and to be empowered as Christ’s body in our broken world.

We ask for the grace to keep the hurtful events of this election season from having power over our present, our future, and our human family.

We ask for the grace to release any feelings of disdain or despair, so that we might continue as beacons of Christian hope in the world.

We ask for the grace to release mindsets or behaviors which might, consciously or unconsciously, by intention or misguided effort, be destructive to any.

We ask for the grace to release the struggle for power, control and the need to be right.

We ask for the grace to release resentments, hard-heartedness and blame we may have placed on others.

We ask for the grace to recognize your hand at work in our country and in our lives, that we would move forward in hope and love.

We ask for the grace to be bearers of your love, healers of division, peacemakers in the world.

And when we stray from the path of reconciliation and peace, we ask your grace in choosing again and again, the way of love.