

“We’ll triumph through our sorrows and rise to bless you still...”

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Collect for Proper 28, The Book of Common Prayer, page 245

26TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Malachi 4:1-2a, 13-14, Psalm 98, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13, Luke 21:5-19 (Proper 28C)

November 13, 2016

ST. MARK’S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

THE GOSPEL READING: LUKE 21:5-19

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 upon another; all will be thrown down.”

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.”

Whatever I thought I was going to do this week, what I *have* done is have serial discussions about the outcome of our national election.

As we all know, and as I have noted in various sermons, the campaign was barely bearable. Often the sort of thing that I would want to shield

children from – like the motion picture association ratings – rated R or NC-17 for disturbing sexual content, language or violence.

While I have felt for months that Donald Trump could get the nomination and could win the election, and while I finally settled some time

back on being sure that he would win, like many who either voted for him or didn't, I am feeling the reality of his electoral college win as a dramatic occurrence in our country.

And, at this point, I want to remind those who know, or inform those who don't know, that the readings each Sunday are appointed on a three-year, Sunday-by-Sunday cycle called the lectionary. So it is pure coincidence that the gospel reading concerns itself with wars and insurrections, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines and plagues; dreadful portents and great signs from heaven....

So this election result is something of an earthquake...

And probably more like an earthquake in that a lot has been going on for a long time underground leading up to the cataclysm that has surfaced. And, for all the words and all the money spent on the campaign, neither campaign was able to insightfully identify or address these underlying stresses and shifts.

The deeply devout *New York Times* commentator David Brooks in a Friday column, called *The View from Trump Tower*, writes about this larger, mostly unaddressed context: "This century is still being formed and none of us understand it yet. The century really began on 9/11 [2001], and so far it has been marked by strong reactions against globalism and cosmopolitanism — by terrorism, tribalism and authoritarianism.

He says: "Populism [...] has always been a warning sign, a warning sign that there is some deeper dysfunction in our economic, social and

cultural systems. If you want to take that warning sign and dismiss it [...] you're never going to pause to understand what's going on and you will never know how to constructively respond."

And he adds: "...it seems important to be humbled and taught...."

The Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault, who is a mystic, Episcopal priest, writer, and internationally-known retreat leader, responded to the "earthquake" writing: "Now that the shake-up has occurred, it is our calling to use our heads and hearts in a [...] way to look at what is needed now and how we might collaborate with it in creating new possibilities in our world."

She refers to Teilhard de Chardin (the 20th century, philosopher, scientist and priest) in saying, from his work, "we have the reassurance that evolutionary change flows over deep time. Events which, viewed at the wrong scale (i.e., too close up), look like devastating upheavals may actually prove to be relatively minor systemic adjustments. Beneath the surface ripples and rapids, the river itself is still flowing smoothly in its channel."

Can we discern the flowing of the river?

Resonating with David Brooks, she goes on to say: "I keep seeing that this election of Donald Trump in a way completes a [larger arc of time] that began on September 11, 2001. In the last fifteen years, our country has struggled under a pervasive and growing sense of vulnerability, impotence, helplessness, of having been subjected to a collective [assault] [*her word*: rape] which still paralyzes the resolve [or will to live] [*gout de vivre*, as Teilhard calls it].

It expresses itself across the board: in the obsession with guns and gun violence, the very real threats to life and wellbeing in marginalized communities, and in the more privileged classes with the almost hysteria around food, security, and child safety.”

I would add to Bourgeault’s assessment our escapism in technology, absorption in screens, including video gaming – and in the epidemic of opioid and other addictions.

Bourgeault continues: “I really believe that at a subliminal level, Trump’s slogan ‘Make America Great Again’ speaks to that sense of releasing the paralyzed, hang-dog fear which is the only America we have come to know. It’s not really about economics. It’s about something way deeper....”

And she adds: “At least a basis on which to begin: If we could quit calling each other idiots and ‘deplorables’ and begin to deal with the deep terror, the desperation and helplessness which is felt across the board, we might begin to sense the ways to draw together.”

Fr. Richard Rohr writes about the election saying, “I suspect that we get the leaders who mirror what we have become as a nation. *They are our shadow self for all to see.* That is what the Jewish prophets told Israel both before and during their painful and long Exile (596-538 BC).”

He says: “Maybe some of us naively thought that we could or should place our loyalty in a political agenda or party. Remember, Yahweh told Israel that they should never put their trust in ‘princes, horses, or chariots’ (Psalms 20:7, 33:16-17), but only in the love of God. *We must not imagine that political or programmatic changes—of*

themselves—will ever bring about the goodness, charity, or transformation that the Gospel offers the world.” [His emphasis.]

Fr. Richard continues: “Do not be afraid to allow conventional wisdom to fail and disappoint you, which is often the only path to wisdom. Imperial thinking focuses on judging who is worthy and who is unworthy, who is in and who is out. We who know about universal belonging and identity in God have a different form of power: Love (even of enemies) is our habitat, not the kingdoms of this world.”

And he concludes: “Only a contemplative mind can hold our fear, confusion, vulnerability, and anger and guide us toward love.”

And so seeking the contemplative mind – which is to say, taking on contemplative practice – an awakening at our core – is a good approach for all of us as the 21st century continues.

The gospel reading concludes: “By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

This endurance does not, in any sense, deny or minimize or dismiss the very clear experiences of pain, loss and fear that have been and will continue to mark the lives of many of us, many of our neighbors and many Americans who are strangers to us.

Quite apart from denying or repressing lies, betrayal, injustice, suffering, cruelty, abuse, torture, death and the echoes of loss and emptiness, the life of Jesus and our life as his living body never strays from remembering his entering all of these aspects of real, bloody, broken-down human life in his and our cross.

He was crucified and continues to

be crucified.

Because we can name crucifixion for what it is, we can name all that is killing people today for what it is.

The Rev. Laura Patterson, a United Methodist minister writes: “My witness and care must be to weep and rage alongside those for whom the denial of their identity and humanity and safety has been used to rally political support. As a woman, I can include myself. My pastoral anxiety creates a space where we prevent normalization of what is in conflict with our belief in a loving God and a compassionate society. It allows those who are grieving and fearful to affirm the value of their lives in the midst of a strong message to the contrary, without the implication that we have to start getting used to the way things are now. It denies the dismissal of outrage, pain, and very real current threats, ...”

Regarding the cross at the center of our experience and world view as Christ-followers, she writes: “As Christians, we already respond to violence in this way. We make space to name the injustice, inhumanity, and tragedy of Christ’s death in the Eucharist and in our Good Friday rituals. Those times are not about healing from the grief of the Crucifixion and moving on, but about reliving it and making it fresh in our minds and hearts and guts. As pastors, we ask our people to be motivated by what they experience in those spaces and to change the world. At the same time that we are re-wounded with Christ, we are also reminded that there is enough hope to stay in the struggle and believe that the Kin[g]dom will come.”

Again, from the gospel reading:

“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Or as Paul concludes in Second Thessalonians: “Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.”

Or the prophet Malachi as we heard today: “...the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.”

Or the psalm we just prayed: “Sing to the LORD a new song...”

Or as we sang in the hymn at the procession in: “...whether our tomorrows be filled with good or ill, we will triumph through our sorrows and rise to bless you still...”

Or as we will sing at the procession out, the hymn we sang in my parish four miles from Manhattan on the night of September 11, 2001, with many in the congregation still covered by the dust and ash from the collapse of the Trade Center towers: “Mortal pride and earthly glory, sword and crown betray our trust; though with care and toil we build them, tower and temple fall to dust. But God’s power, hour by hour is my temple and my tower.”

No matter who we voted for, no matter the winner of this election or the next one or the one after that, God provides food and companionship, the profound, undying love and true power we need, individually and in faithful community – not only for these days, not only for our lives, but for the life of the whole world. We can continue to live and take action, face risk, and, using Bishop Spong’s phrase, continue to love wastefully and with courage in these times, all our days, and for all time.