

# The Present Time

God of constant mercy, who sent your Son to reconcile us to you and to one another: remind us of your goodness, increase your grace within us, that our gratitude may grow, through Jesus Christ our Life and Hope. Amen.

*Based on the Additional Collects, The Church of England*

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THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (PROPER 15C)

Hebrews 11:29—12:2, Psalm 82, Luke 12:49-56

August 14, 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

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THE GOSPEL READING: LUKE 12:49-56

Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

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It seems Jesus wants to get into the storm of rhetoric in our American campaign season.

But Jesus isn't offering us empty invective.

We are hearing Jesus stressed by the work he is attempting to do in the world – the world we know so well – in which *we* are often stressed and in which we are also often distracted and complacent.

Also, unlike Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton or any of the raft of other candidates now haranguing

us, and even unlike the Olympic athletes competing for gold, the aim of Jesus is not a win, a personal best.

Jesus is not trying to show us who he is, he is trying to show us who we are, to awaken us to a larger reality and possibility for ourselves and for all of humanity and our living in the created environment of the world.

We live in a global culture that sees a silver medal in the Olympics as a failure.

We find our own ways of viewing who we are and what we have as similarly inadequate and get caught up in trying to win or, more likely, to not appear to be losing.

And, in the process, we overlook so much that we are, that we have, that we can be and do.

We find myriad ways to check out of the reality that is actually here, that is the immediate, present life in the living, sacred and holy and meant for every person – our friends and families, people we feel close to, people who share our outlook and values – as well as people who are strangers, foreigners, who threaten us, frighten us.

Jesus is hoping is that people will wake up, will see that he is showing a God who is very near, who is as close as our breath, who is not far off but who is engaged in every aspect of our lives and all of life... and that God's view of us and everything is literally essential to each person and to all life, to the whole created order.

It is easy to feel like the life of the world is on a path of mutually assured destruction through violence and waste, corruption and greed. When we feel that way, we are beginning to feel what Jesus is feeling, what God experiences in the continual denigration of all that continually flows from God's abundance.

It can make a person anxious – and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Look at that profound passage from Hebrews. In hearing about those who lived “by faith” we are hearing about people like us – not people who are moral paradigms or arbiters of culture or politically or economically powerful folk. What we are hearing about are people who, relying on the sacred in their lives, who were engaged and connected to God, and in that flow of life, were able to rise to the challenges of the real, brutal world in which we are living, to make tangible, life-giving, life-sustaining and meaningful action in the world.

The point is not to run a race just to run or for recreation or to take up time or because we don't have anything better to do – and certainly not to get a gold, not a silver medal.

The “race” we hear about in Hebrews is to continue as we do – sometimes it looks like just muddling along – but aiming to be more and more open and available to the God of life who is wholly available to us and constantly, compassionately present with us and in us and for the whole, real world around us.

It likely means making conscious choices about our priorities – especially in a world that is constantly urging us to spend more for things that are

“priceless” – even though we already both are and have what is truly priceless.

Think about the fact, as demonstrated by this gospel reading, that Jesus was frustrated, stressed, anxious in dealing with people face to face on earth – the same face to face encounter we have with ourselves in the mirror every day and with one another. What are the chances we’re going to get the message every time or even most of the time – and act accordingly?

Not very high....

But that’s why the baptized life that we are living is a whole life, in which we make different choices, realign our preferences and change what gets our attention over time.

Every time someone is baptized, we all recommit to the baptismal covenant that is a foundation for our identity as a community of Christ-followers. What is the character of our gathering together? How and what evil do we resist? What good news do we proclaim by what we say and do? How are we seeking and serving all persons? How are we loving our neighbors – friends and strangers – as ourselves? In what ways are we striving (running the race) to bring justice and peace among all people and respecting the

dignity of every human being?

Our baptismal identity makes clear that the point of St. Mark’s, of forming and living in and caring for a faith community – of making our life together a key element of each of our individual lives – for being the church – is not to kill time or offer another nonprofit organization or club to the community calendar.

In what ways are we agents of God’s presence, God’s creativity, God’s life-force, God’s healing and redemption in the world, in this neighborhood? How is wholeness and the fullness of human identity expressed, encouraged, made more possible in everything we are, in all that we do?

Everything that works against people and the creation sometimes seems to have a head start... Everything that absorbs our attention and distracts us 24/7 is undeniably part of 21<sup>st</sup> century life.

But we’re running this race in God, with God, for God and with and for one another and for the life of the world that God so loves.

Can we imagine more clearly what we are becoming – both as individuals and as St. Mark’s – and might the Jesus who is stressed by what he is experiencing have something to say to us now?



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[www.smitv.org](http://www.smitv.org)