

Sermon for November 13, 2016

At the Edge of the Eschaton (End Things)

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Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Here we find ourselves on the edge of the new Church Year. Just two weeks and we enter the season of Advent.

Our Gospel text from Luke this morning finds Jesus on the edge of the eschaton, the end times or so it appears. Jesus has entered Jerusalem for the last time and he points to the stones of the temple telling his disciples it will eventually be a pile of rubble, not one stone on another. Imagine Jesus telling us that this beloved building, these blocks of cut Italian granite that provide us a safe place to worship, these stones that have sheltered us in times of trouble and times of great joy – it will all come down, a pile of debris and dust. We might very well be like Jesus' disciples who ask him when will this happen, what will be the signs, how will we know it is about to happen.

Jesus offers no time table, in fact warns them against charlatans who will predict the end time the Hal Lindsays, the Harold Campings – remember Harold, he had it figured out, May 21, 2011 the world would all end, and of course, we're all still here and Harold now rests in peace. We resist following false teachers and leaders.

And then Jesus speaks of signs - wars, famines, plagues and earthquakes – not welcome signs but dreadful signs. And here we are, nearly 2,000 years after Jesus spoke these words and how many tens of thousands of wars, and famines, plagues and earthquakes has the world suffered? What does it mean? We read in Matthew's gospel not once but twice when Jesus says

no one knows the day or the hour when the end times will come. And Jesus says the same in the first chapter of Acts. Only the Father knows. When we suffer these hardships – these wars and terrible storms of life – we discern the presence of God in Christ and witness to others of our faith in God.

And Jesus tells his disciples there will be times of persecution ahead. And there has been persecution from the beginning right down to the present time. In the Middle East today, and some places in Africa we see our Christian sisters and brothers suffering for their faith – killed and kidnapped and driven from their ancestral lands. And if it happens to us, Jesus says do not worry about what you will say, – I will give you a vocabulary of faith that will not desert you when the time comes to speak up for what you believe.

Our Gospel ends with Jesus telling his disciples – not a hair on your head will perish, by your endurance you will gain your souls. So, we take comfort in the presence of God who will never leave us or forsake us.

The edge of the Eschaton, the edge of the end times. Sometimes the edges are places of conflict, this Veteran's Day weekend we remember with deep gratitude those who have served our country. And some of them were on the edges, the dangerous edges of war, the front lines where battles are won or lost, where usually the most blood is shed. Where the most sacrifice takes place.

And some edge places are places of great productivity. Think of the edge of the woods along a field or open meadow. That's where you find the dogwood trees and the shadberry bushes that provide an abundance of food for the birds and animals. You won't find the wild raspberry bushes and the wild asparagus in the deep forest, only along the edges. If you have

ever gleaned a corn field – it’s along the edges and the corners that you find the most corn. Or the Chesapeake Bay, on the edge of land and water, this estuary is the greatest protein factory in the world.

And along this edge time of the eschaton Jesus anticipates the end of the world in some great and imminent crisis, visions of cosmic upheaval.

Every one of us in this sanctuary knows about upheaval, don’t we? The upheaval of the Presidential election. The pollsters and the pundits and the political class had it, oh, so wrong. Some of you are rejoicing. Some of you are suffering the anguish of disappointment. And some of you don’t care. Presidents come and Presidents go, and the republic still stands.

Judging by my email, there are many of you who are hurting and fearful for what the future holds and I direct these words to you. Do not despair. But most of all, be respectful and be supportive of the President-elect. The election was not rigged, it was free and it was fair, and we both as Christians and citizens are called to respect the outcome. Pray for the President Elect.

And for those who are happy and pleased, these words are for you. Remember those times in the past when you have suffered disappointment. Be gracious and magnanimous in victory and be understanding of those who do not share your happiness. Pray for the President Elect.

For all of us remember Jesus’ words from the 3rd chapter of Mark, though spoken in response to the accusation that he was possessed by the devil, these words, quoted by Abraham Lincoln at the time of the Civil War, resonate with us – “A kingdom divided against itself, cannot stand.”

Maybe, just maybe we are on edge of something, that despite the widespread fear and alarm there will be a time of great productivity, or maybe we are on the edge of great conflict and turmoil. We pray for productive, prosperous and peaceful days ahead.

But know this, if this new administration demonizes and vilifies immigrants, and Muslims and Mexicans and people of color-we Christians will extend a hand of friendship and love to these very same people – why? Because Jesus did. He loved the the Samaritan and the Canaanite, the stranger. It made no difference. Jesus loved all of humanity and calls us to do the same.

But know this, if this new administration and Congress takes away health insurance from the 16 million poor people and working poor who were added to the Medicaid program then we will redouble our efforts to be God's healing hands in the world why? Because Jesus did. Twenty percent of the New Testament is stories of Jesus' healing the sick. Christians in our nation have a long, rich heritage of building and supporting hospitals – why do they bear names like St. Agnes, Good Samaritan, St Joseph , Mercy – why did the Christian congregations in Catonsville come together to create Suburban Pastoral Counseling, a faith counseling center - why do people of faith came together to provide health care for their community because Jesus did.

But know this, if this new administration builds walls that separate us one from another, then we Christians will continue to work to build bridges of mutual understanding, mutual respect and cooperation. Why? Because Jesus did. And he built the most important bridge of all. The bridge between you and God. From our sin and from our estrangement Jesus brings us into a living, loving relationship with our God. Jesus justifies us, reconciles us, saves us. And that relationship changes everything, it transforms us into a people passionate for justice and

peace. It transforms us into a people who are gentle but strong, compassionate and kind, who know that hate is not met with more hate, but only, but only love can conquer hate. For you see when Jesus was gazing at the temple and telling them what was to come, he was standing on the very edge of his own suffering and his passion. He would soon be arrested, beaten and tortured, subjected to a sham trial by the government and the religious establishment, all the while being deserted by friends and mocked by his enemies. His suffering and death on the cross, in all of its scandal, strangeness, in all of its weakness and horror – the cross would be the very means of our salvation. And on the third day after he died with criminals at his right and left, God raised Jesus from the dead to show us, to show the powers of this world, to show all generations to come that God's love is stronger than death and the grave, that righteousness triumphs over evil, that love is stronger than hate.

Pray for our President Elect. Pray for our country because a nation divided against itself cannot stand. And be at peace with one another. Amen