

Sermon for Sunday, November 13, 2022 – Do Not Grow Weary
Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 28, Track 1, Year C
The Episcopal Church of The Atonement, Wilbraham
Rev. Patricia M. O’Connell, Deacon

Isaiah 65:17-25; Canticle 9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

Almighty Father, Creator of all, through your grace, our lives have been enriched. Grant us the grace to hear your voice and not grow weary of doing what is right. Amen.

In this morning’s Collect by which we prayed these words:

“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.”

we affirmed that our Blessed Lord caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning.

Today’s gospel from Luke does seemingly pose a learning challenge to all of us who were listening to this apocalyptic discourse from Jesus this morning. Therein, Jesus speaks of wars, endurance, betrayal, and suffering for his sake.

These are not words that we want to be hearing on a crisp Autumn morning in November. This dark side of the Jesus, whom we associate with the gospel of love of God and neighbor, is a variation on a theme, though, that can be found in the corresponding writings of Matthew and Mark as well. There is the prediction of the destruction of the Temple. There are questions about the signs before the end, and predictions about the persecutions that are to come. It is speech spoken by Jesus of the foreboding end times that does tend to send a chill up our spines and puts fear in our hearts.

It is a discourse that bears remarkable resemblance to our own recent pre-election public discourse. As a people, we do tend to get caught up in the drama, in doom and gloom,

and pending disaster. We tend to let our fears trouble us and to allow the unknowns to cast doubt on what the future may or may not hold for us.

This is where the learning dimension of holy scripture comes into play. This is where we look beyond that which causes us dread to discover the hope that lies beyond our fears. When we lean in to this apocalyptic gospel and deepen our listening to truly hear what Jesus is saying to the disciples, the message that lies therein can be revealed to us.

Jesus declares what we already know, that bad things are going on in the world. There have always been wars and natural disasters. Good people and even family members have been known to betray one another. These same bad things can be happening right here in Massachusetts, in this City of Westfield, in the safety or not of our own homes.

If we set aside our preoccupation with the end times and focus on what Jesus is saying to us in the now, we would hear Jesus telling us, “Don’t be driven by your fears.” “Don’t be led astray.” Jesus is assuring us that he will give us the words and the wisdom that we require to stay the course. All we need do is to keep the faith, to endure. We are reassured by Jesus in his words, “By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

The good news in this gospel is that no matter the challenges that come our way, “not a hair on our heads will perish.” This isn’t the first time that Luke speaks of Jesus referencing the hairs of one’s head. In Luke 12:7, Jesus said “But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not be afraid, you are of more value than many sparrows.”

These words spoken by Jesus are not intended to be taken literally. The hairs on our heads is metaphorical. The good news that Jesus is giving to us is that our God knows every minute detail about us. Our salvation is in our souls not in our bodies that are bound to this earth—bodies that we know will one day turn back to the dust from which humankind was made. Through our faithful endurance, we will survive any test that comes our way.

Endurance of this magnitude does require faith—a faith that is active and engaged—a faith that is open to receiving the word and the wisdom that God desires to impart to the faithful.

It strikes me that today's gospel from Luke is very relevant to this congregation worshipping at The Atonement in Westfield. You are experiencing apocalyptic times. You are in a period of transition with major decisions to address. The priest who guided you during the last decade plus has moved on. As a congregation, you must decide the role of the next presiding priest to lead you forward. Will he/she/they be part-time or full-time? Will the clerical role be as a priest in charge or as a rector? Will the clergy person be shared with another Episcopal Church or even another denomination? Could the one to be called come from another denomination in communion with The Episcopal Church?

This temple in which you worship has been a central place of worship for many decades. It is a beautiful building intact with the history and memories of rituals, traditions, and many, many family ties. It has become the cornerstone of this worshipping community. It is also aging, just as the community within its walls is aging. Is it sustainable?

These are questions that certainly raise fears and concerns for those listening to them. They are also questions that when heard by the faithful become an opportunity to put their faith into action. It is a faith of defiance—believing and digging deep, disallowing fear to be a controlling force in decision making, refusing to be led astray by naysayers or those who fail to raise up the good of the community. It may seem for a time that you are doomed. In faith, you will be led by the work of the Holy Spirit. In faith, the voices appointed by God will speak with the wisdom needed and required. In faith, by working together, for one another, you will live according to the traditions of the numerous disciples and Atonemates who have preceded you. You will imitate their faith and your labor of love will be rewarded.

In the words from the last verse in today's reading from Thessalonians, "Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right."

Embrace and hold fast to the blessed hope that has been given to you through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.