

The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
November 13, 2013
Year C, Proper 28, RCL

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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 taken down." In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We live in a time of anxiety. Just as Jesus predicted there are indeed "wars and insurrections." Nation does rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there are great earthquakes and typhoons and forest fires and in various places famines and plagues. And if some see dreadful portents and great signs from heaven, who will gainsay them? Moreover, if some of these difficulties seem remote, here in the United States we are anxious about the economy, the security of our jobs, the value of our houses. We are anxious about how the transition of power from one national administration to the next will be carried out. Even the things we used to be able to rely on for stability and security are no longer dependable. The prestige of American made goods. The morality and power of the U.S Government. "These things which you see" -- the days will come when they shall fail.

All things are passing. Our family and friends; one by one they age and die. The health and vigor of our own bodies gradually decline. Perhaps even our planet and our race are passing away.

So what are these things that we see? What is the horizon of our vision? Are we limited to these things that are passing, or can we glimpse some other reality? What is it that lies beyond the horizon of our sight? What "new heavens and a new earth" is coming towards us on the glow of "rosy fingered dawn"? Can we imagine a time or place when "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox," a time when "They shall not hurt or destroy on all [God's] holy mountain?" Do we know of a new day coming, the sun rising with healing in its wings? Do we know of a king coming, our own dear Lord coming back to us, with power and great glory?

If we are Christians, we do. If we are Christians, we believe and trust that there is more to this world than meets the eye. If we are Christians, we put our trust in that new day which is coming but not yet here. We see the first glow. Others who are occupied with the immediate things and whose eyes are fixed assiduously on the ground lest they trip over something, cannot see that in which we put our hope and trust. And so we try to tell them. "Look, see! There, beyond that hill, around that bend in the road, there is joy. There is healing, there is wholeness, there is glory." We proclaim to all who will listen, "This which you see is not all there is. There is also Jesus. And he makes all the difference."

However, we live in the mean time. In the mean time, we live in this world of famine and pestilence, of war, and persecution. And when we tell of our vision of another reality, of another power, of another Lord, we will be mocked, we will be accused of being impractical, we will be accused of inhibiting real progress with our idealism. We shall be pushed aside, put down, removed. Even our friends and family will misunderstand us and try to get us to be realistic and responsible. How can you give so much money away? Don't you know you may need it if things go badly? How can you spend so much time helping those who are hungry? They're just going to be hungry again tomorrow. How can you spend so much time praying, or reading the Bible? Isn't that a waste of time, when there is so much important work to be done? How can you spend so much time in the Church? That institution is hopelessly out of touch with real life.

And what is our response? "They will arrest you and persecute you . . . because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify." We tell what we have seen. I have met Jesus. I know that my Redeemer lives. I know that love is stronger than death. I know my Lord, and he will not forsake me. I may not win, but I will stand. And in the end God will win. Jesus is my savior. And his Victory has already been assured in his rising from the dead. This is our testimony; this is our witness. They may listen or not. Some few will have ears to hear, many will not. Some of us may die. But not one hair of our heads will be destroyed. Even death will not damage us, for we have

already been inoculated against death, when we were baptized into Jesus' death and rose to new life in him.

So how do we live in this mean time? How do we act responsibly in a world that is made good and beloved by God, and yet which is passing away? The great German theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was once asked what he would do if he knew that the end of the world would come tomorrow. He answered, "Today I would plant a tree." Bonhoeffer could see beyond the end. He could see past destruction to the new world, he could see past death to eternal life. What is the greatest testimony we can give to our hope, belief, and certainty that there is a new day coming, that a new world is coming, that the Day of Lord will dawn, that our Lord Jesus will come again and put all things right? It is not to abandon this passing world, but to act in it as if it were worth redeeming. While we will not trust it any farther than we can throw it, we will trust God, and follow his example in loving it and caring for it. The attitude we Christians are to have is described by the Greek word ὑπομονή (hupomone). It means "patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance." Stick-to-it-ness in short. This is the answer to all trials, and temptations. Not heroism, so much as hanging on. Not the exercise of our power, but reliance on God's. Not interpreting our circumstances as punishment, but as an opportunity to witness to our Lord. Instead of asking "Why me?", we ask our Lord, "What do you want to me to learn?" or "How can I bear witness to you in these circumstances?" So we continue in our prayers. We continue to read the Bible. We continue to raise our children in the knowledge and love of God. We continue to work for peace among all people. We continued to confront evil in all its forms.

If this sounds overly melodramatic or too cosmic, we have life in this community of St. Michael's as practice room or laboratory in which we can practice this patience and fortitude. We can practice apologizing for the ways that we cause small pains to others. We can be thoughtful about how others feel and how we can support them in their ministries. We can learn that every event in the parish is our event collectively and we all have an obligation to support it as best we

can. We can celebrate our differences by putting them to use. We can attribute only positive motives to those who irritate us. In short, the way we help God build the kingdom on earth is by doing our best to make our parish community as much like that kingdom as possible.

We are now in the middle of the two weeks of when members of the parish visit each other and make financial pledges for 2017. I would normally give “Stewardship Sermon” encouraging everyone to tithe or at least calculate their pledge as proportion of their income. Today I want to call on you for another kind of stewardship. Let us understand ourselves as stewards of the Kingdom of God. Let us see ourselves as agents of building that community of love, reconciliation, and cooperating power that we long to inhabit. Let us treat each other with respect and gentleness. Let us encourage, support and strengthen one another in our endeavors. Let see every ministry in this parish as our collective ministry. The music is our music, not just the choir’s. The Church School is our church School, not just the families with young children. The Flowers, the outreach the property commission, the administration, hospitality—it is all the responsibility and joy of all of us. We are the Body of Christ. We are no longer ourselves alone; we are the people of God. We are the Body of Christ and our task is to help draw the whole world into God’s future.

“As for these things that you see, the days will come when . . . all will be thrown down. . . Beware that you are not led astray. . . do not be terrified. . . They will persecute you. . . because of my name. . . This will give you an opportunity to testify. . . 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.”