

Stand up!

Luke 21:25-28

November 29, 2009

We are Iowans: independent-minded, hardworking, strong-willed, the salt of the earth. We don't need the limelight. The satisfaction itself of doing the job right is reward enough for us.

We are providers and we are problem solvers. If a problem stumps us, if its solution seems to require knowledge or skills we do not possess, then we'll get the knowledge or learn the skill, or we'll try a new approach, or we'll just stick at it until sheer will power finds a way through.

But what happens when we meet our match? What happens when we find ourselves overwhelmed by a problem, a threat, that exhausts all our resources and thwarts all our best efforts? What happens when our carefully-managed lives begin to unravel, when the ground itself seems to shift beneath our feet, when normal just isn't normal anymore? What do we have left then?

When you've tried everything, when you've solicited second and third opinions, when there are no new drugs to try, when the illness has resisted every therapy, what do you have left?

Hope.

When your employer cuts your hours and ups the co-pay on your health insurance, when you're already three months behind on the mortgage and your car blows a radiator, what do you have left?

Hope.

When he won't listen to you, when he won't talk to you except in anger, when you see him throwing his life away and he won't let you do anything to help him, what do you have left?

Hope.

When you feel everybody's eyes on you, judging you, because you're different, because you're not like them, when everything seems to come harder for you, because you're different, because you're not like them, what do you have left?

Hope.

When time has caught up with you, taking its toll on your body and your mind, when time has taken from you almost everything you hold dear, almost everyone you hold dear, what do you have left?

Hope.

When the world doesn't seem safe, when your own neighborhood doesn't seem safe, when a child is shot at a Thanksgiving dinner, when soldiers are shot at a Texas army post, when kids are shot on the streets of Waterloo, what do you have left?

Hope.

When soldiers are on the ground still in Iraq and Afghanistan, when staying the course seems futile and a waste of human life, but pulling out would seem to leave them and leave us with a most uncertain future, what do we have left?

Hope.

When the snowballing effects of wanton consumption and heedless pollution and monstrous waste leave the fate of our planet hanging in the balance and nobody -- no person, no community, no nation -- seems to care enough to want to try to do things differently, what do we have left?

Hope.

When the sun turns dark and the moon blood red, when the stars begin to fall from the sky, when the seas rise up and threaten to deluge the land, when the earth itself becomes a home for terror, what do we have left?

Hope ... because when these things begin to happen, your salvation is near! That's what Jesus said: *Your salvation is near!*

He spoke of a time of upheaval and turmoil beyond anything any of us have ever seen, beyond anything any of us could ever imagine. He spoke of the Day of the Lord, the end of this age, the end of this world as we know it. But he told us not to be afraid. He told us to recognize the signs. And he told us to stand up. Not to run and hide, not to cower in fear, not to huddle close in whatever safe haven we can find, not to give up, but to stand up and raise our heads, because our salvation is near!

Jesus words are a warning. He doesn't want his followers to be taken by surprise, to be surprised by trouble and war and famine and earthquakes and all kinds of strange and terrifying things. These things will happen. These things are happening. The earth itself is groaning in pain.

But his words are also words of encouragement. The groans of the earth are like the groans of childbirth. Its pains are the labor pains that signal the coming birth of a new world, the signs that presage the coming of our Lord in power and glory.

Jesus assures us the world is not left to its own devices. Its fate is not left to chance. Its destiny is not left in the hands of those who people it. It will not come to an end with a bang or a whimper, but this world will be transformed, remade, re-created, by the One who made it in the first place.

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. This is the essence of faith, to have eyes always looking forward, waiting expectantly for the next thing God will do, waiting eagerly for the last thing God will do. Faith looks at the world with clear eyes, seeing it as it is, but believing, knowing, that our salvation is near.

And because we know our salvation is near, because we are sure of the things we hope for, we stand up!

When the doctor's report is not good news, what are you going to do?

Stand up!

When your wallet is feeling the squeeze and the economic forecast is all doom and gloom, what are you going to do?

Stand up!

When she is doing her best to shut you out, to shut out anybody who tries to tell her what she's not ready to hear, what are you going to do?

Stand up!

When you feel ignored, put down, shoved aside, used, abused, what are you going to do?

Stand up!

When the news reports are disturbing and terror creeps closer and closer to your front door, what are you going to do?

Stand up!

When peace seems unattainable and war inevitable, what are you going to do?

Stand up!

When greed and gluttony and public apathy leave our planet with few to defend it, what are you going to do?

Stand up!

Come hell or high water, famine or earthquake, the end of time itself ... or just another new day, what are you going to do?

Stand up!