

This is our chance!

Luke 21:5-19

November 13, 2016

This is our chance.

There are many angry people out there right now, some angry about the outcome of this election, and others whose anger helped propel the outcome of this election.

This is our chance.

There are many frightened people out there right now, some frightened by what might be done to us, by extremists foreign-born or homegrown, and others frightened by what we might do, by the ways our own brand of extremism may make the world a more dangerous and inhospitable place.

This is our chance.

There are many worried people out there right now, worried about being able to afford health insurance, worried about being able to afford retirement, worried about the availability of jobs, of good jobs, for their children and grandchildren, and many genuinely worried about our collective future, about the livability of this planet in a time of ingrained prejudices and permanent war, recurring natural disasters and a dangerously warming climate.

This is our chance! Because we will not be swayed by anger or fear or worry. Will we? We will live by hope and faith and love.

Hope and faith and love. These are not pretty “church” words, used when lighting pretty candles or saying pretty prayers. These are gritty, hardscrabble, rubber-meets-the-road words. It takes guts to hope, determination to have faith, and courage, lots of courage, to love. Hope and faith and love are the way we choose to live, the way we dare to live, right here right now.

Let me read from Luke’s gospel the events that immediately precede today’s lesson:

Jesus looked around and saw rich people dropping their gifts in the Temple treasury, and he also saw a very poor widow dropping in two little copper coins. He said, “I tell you that this poor widow put in more than all the others. For the others offered their gifts from what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, gave all she had to live on.”

She gave all she had to live on. Was she consumed by anger or fear or worry? Hardly! She had every right to be worried -- she had two pennies to her name. She had every right to feel afraid -- how will she live? And she surely had every right to be angry, because it was not her own failures that made her poor. But she gave what she had, wanting to honor her God, utterly trusting that God would provide. She had guts. She was determined. She had courage. She loved God and it showed.

Jesus looked at her and said, "Wow!" Jesus' disciples said "Wow!" when they looked at the Temple. They saw the magnificent building with its grand architecture and impressive furnishings and they saw all the costly offerings brought there by worshippers and they said, "Wow!"

We like things we can hold on to. We like things we can stand on. We like things -- things we have made, made to last, made to serve us and our descendants generation after generation. We like temples, churches, governments, homelands.

We love our country, we prize our monuments, we count on our institutions, but none of these will not last. "All this you see -- the time will come when not a single stone will be left in its place." This is true of every temple, of every church, of every government, of every nation. The time will come when not a single stone will be left. The things we like to count on, we cannot count on.

"When?" they wanted to know. "When will this be?" They aren't curious. They're scared! And neither they nor we will be at all reassured by Jesus' answer. "Who knows?" The question is not when, but how, not when will our treasured monuments fall, but how will we live when it happens.

Because it's going to happen. Jesus paints a grim picture of what is coming.

There will be wars, he says, and there are wars -- in Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, and the Ukraine. The Institute for Economics and Peace reports that 151 of the world's 162 nations are currently at war in some fashion. We, the United States, are involved in 134 of these conflicts.

There will be earthquakes, Jesus says, and there have been are earthquakes -- in Italy, Haiti, Nepal, Japan, Oklahoma.

There will be famines, he says, and there are famines -- in Somalia, Syria, Guatemala, and Yemen.

There will be plagues, he says, and there are -- ebola, zika, AIDS.

There will be strange and terrifying things coming from the sky, he says. At this very moment, in Aleppo, there are strange and terrifying things coming from the sky. In New York City fifteen years ago, strange and terrifying things came from the sky.

It's happening. It's happening, but don't be afraid. Don't be afraid, Jesus says, because these things are bound to happen. Don't worry that the end is near. You don't know that it is,. But when the world is falling down around you, this is your chance. This is your chance to tell the Good News.

This is our chance! When so many people are worried, this is our chance to tell the Good News, to talk about hope and to live by hope. Don't grumble and grouse and fret. Do! Because that is what hope does: hope does! Hope believes there is something we can do. Hope believes there is something we must do and that doing it makes a difference.

This is our chance! When so many people are frightened, this is our chance to tell the Good News, to talk about faith and to live by faith. When you do, when you choose to believe God and not conform to the moods and ways and priorities of this world, some people may scoff at you, and some people may hate you, and some people may betray you, and you may die. All of us will die. And yet not a single hair from your heads will be lost.

Wait a minute. I may die, but not a single hair from my head will be lost? Yes! When you put your life in God's hands, your life is in God's hands and you have nothing to fear, not even death. Jesus put himself entirely in God's hands, and he died. But was Jesus lost?

Fear is paralyzing. When you are afraid you don't take risks. You don't reach out. You don't live. But faith is freeing. You dare to try. You dare to reach out. You dare to live, because you have nothing to lose.

This is our chance! When so many people are angry, this is our chance to tell the Good News, to talk about love and to love them. Do not let evil overcome you, but overcome evil with good.

This is our chance! This is our time! This is the time to stand firm. If we do, if we do not succumb to anger or fear or worry, we will save ourselves, and we just may save somebody else, too ...