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AMDG

Proper 28C, Pentecost 26 - November 13, 2016

Well, I don't know about you, but today's Gospel hits a little too close to home for my taste. This passage in Luke is often called the "Little Apocalypse," and many people have felt that they were going through a little apocalypse of sorts this week.

But, today's reading couldn't have come at a more perfect time, because it addresses the basic problem we all face as followers of Jesus - what do we do when all around us things seem to be falling apart? How do we proceed when our best-laid plans, our highest aspirations, our good works explode before our very eyes? As good people of faith what are we supposed to do?

Today's Gospel, as well as many of the daily readings of this season include a kind of literature called Apocalyptic, which paints very dark and violent pictures of the end of world. But, it shouldn't be too unfamiliar to us, because it's very much like the horror books and movies that many of us enjoy. And, let me tell you I do enjoy some good horror.

Jesus uses this language that was very familiar to his listeners to drive home a basic truth about existence - Don't take this world too seriously...because it will seem dark and absurd...and it's all passing away. Apocalyptic literature - the Revelation to John, the prophets Daniel, Zechariah, Joel, Jeremiah... even Zombies, vampires, werewolves, and beings from other planets - all of it is our very morbid and very human way of expressing the same truth - life can seem dark and absurd, and it all passes away.

Jesus wasn't just proclaiming this truth to get everyone depressed. He was sharing this with his disciples as they were in his last days in the world to get their attention. He was saying, "My friends, the structures and systems of this world are all passing away, because they are not eternal. This is not God's eternal Kingdom. Don't be surprised; don't be afraid; and don't be deceived. Let it all go, and stay focused on the truth. This is not the Kingdom of God...But, the Kingdom of God is here!"

This is not the Kingdom of God...but the Kingdom of God is here? Does it sound confusing? Does it sound contradictory?

Well, what about the promises Fr. Derwent reminded us of a few weeks ago - that as Jesus followers our lives would have purpose; we'd be absurdly happy; we'd be entirely fearless; and we'd always be in trouble. Does that make any more sense?

And then, there's this great Upanishad from the sacred scriptures of India - "The whole world is the garment of the Lord. Renounce it, and receive it as God's gift." That doesn't make much more sense either, does it?

The fact is that the essential truth about our existence in Christ cannot be figured out. It can only be lived. That's what Jesus did. He lived out the essential truth of life in God. He showed us the way. But, how do we live it??

As individuals, first, we have to try to stop figuring it out, stop trying to make it happen. It doesn't make sense, in human terms, and we can't make things right, by our own brains and brawn. When Jesus says Gospel, "don't be led astray," he's reminding us that when we put our faith and hope in the things of this world, in our own limited wisdom and power, we will be disappointed. We will be led astray. Wealth, power, political systems, organizations, even religions, regardless of how well-organized and well-intentioned they are, in the end will always fail to satisfy us. Let it all go; don't put your confidence in the things of this world. They will not bring about the eternal Kingdom. All will be thrown down. Well, that's a cheerful message, now what?

So, next he tells us to not be terrified. There are plenty of places in the New Testament and throughout Hebrew Scriptures where we are told, "Be not afraid." And, I don't believe that means that we're not supposed to feel the feelings that come naturally to us - We can't help but be afraid, or angry, or saddened, sometimes. It is part of our human condition. And right now, there are a lot of feelings to be felt, and we should feel them. But, what God tells us, in Jesus, and throughout Holy Scripture, is "Don't live there." "Don't **Be** afraid." Feel fear, feel anger, feel sadness. But, don't live in fear, and anger, and sadness. Don't get stuck in those feelings; but keep moving forward. But, forward into what?

And, then Jesus tells us, to be ready. Be ready to give testimony. Be ready to be God's Christ in the world. Be ready to share the Good News. Be ready for the Spirit to work through you to do God's will. Isn't it interesting that Jesus says, do not prepare your testimony in advance? It's because the way of God isn't something to be figured out in advance. When we try to use our binary brains to process eternal truth, we're led astray again. God uses each one of us to his purposes - often unwittingly and even unwillingly. And the best way to prepare ourselves to be God's instruments is to live our lives as Jesus taught - humbly, and prayerfully and by doing the next right thing that needs to be done. That includes regular prayer and study of scripture. But, sometimes doing the next right thing means simply going for a walk or taking out the garbage. Sometimes it's cleaning up messes in our lives. Often its doing acts of kindness and standing up for justice. And always its loving others. That's how Christ's body, the Church, brings about God's Kingdom, through us, through our willingness to just show up and be led to do the next right thing. We are not a political movement, we are not a national movement, we are not a philanthropic movement. We are the Jesus movement. And living out the Gospel, following Jesus' commandments means doing the next right thing that needs to be done, and leaving the results to God. That is our purpose as Church - to be God's love, and healing, and strength, and renewal for God's people, the things God puts in front of us to be done. And, then let God worry about the long game. We cannot be effective as Gods instruments when we are following our own wills or worrying about outcomes; we cannot effectively be the face of Christ when we're living in anger and fear. And, when we do these things that Jesus told his followers to do - don't be led astray, don't be afraid, and be ready to share the Gospel - we get glimpses of eternal life; we get to feel the sure and certain truth that not a hair on our heads will perish. We begin to experience, at least in small ways, the prophecies that we heard from Isaiah today. Those glimpses come at unexpected moments, in the sublime beauty of a hawk lifted in the wind; in the delight of watching a child bite into a juicy orange; in the deep satisfaction of helping someone in need; in the ecstasy of sharing communion with one another in the Eucharist; in the deep

release that comes in forgiveness; in the joy of a generous gift freely given.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, there will be dark days, there always have been, and there will continue to be. And, there will be setbacks as we work to build the City of God. But, the Church has to keep moving forward to be what God created it to be, what it has always been through the centuries - a place of comfort; a font of healing, a banquet of nourishment; an open door of welcome; a beacon of forgiveness and hope. And, there are many hurt people to heal and comfort among us right now; many hungry people to feed, naked to clothe, strangers to welcome, enemies to forgive. It is what Jesus' true followers are doing right now in earthquake-broken Italy; it is what they are doing in war-torn Syria; it is what Christ's Church is doing in famished and terrorized Africa, and on our border with tired and fearful refugees. And, it is what we are called to do at St. Andrew's, now and forever. Amen.