Sermon Luke 21:5-19 November 13, 2016

Election Day is over. Whether we feel defeat or victory, whether we feel as a country we moved forward or backward we are the United States of America.

Even though the election results show a divided nation on any number of political, social or religious fronts we are the United States of America. We will need more than ever to find a way to work together for the common good or suffer the consequences.

***We are reminded in scripture Luke 11:17 that a house divided falls upon itself.***

As Christians and members of the Church not just St. Paul Lutheran Church in Missoula MT, but the Universal Christian Church across the globe; our calling as followers of Jesus is the same. It has not changed.

We are called to the highest calling of discipleship first and foremost and that is to love God and serve our neighbor as ourselves.

This calling has not changed for thousands of years nor will it a thousand years from today.

As Christians of different political persuasions and beliefs living across the spectrum of life we are members of the same human family. Like it or not we are.

Jesus knows we struggle to live together as one human family, diverse in color, belief, orientation and tradition, but that doesn’t exempt us from Jesus’ calling to us to be a source of light and truth, healing and hope, justice and forgiveness just as Jesus was and continues to be for all humanity.

Christians regardless of our strongly held opinions what holds us together as Children of God is stronger than what separates us.

What holds us together is that we all need God and God’s mercy because we are a fallen, broken, sinful people. We live in and by God’s mercy and grace. And we have been given gifts and abilities through the Holy Spirit working in us and among us to bring about healing and hope.

This is God’s good work as it has been through time and generations. And it will continue to be in the future whether the future looks bleak or bright to us today.

In our Gospel reading today there’s the thought that things look bright and then there is a word from Jesus that things will be bleak, but ultimately there is hope.

***Hear now the gospel reading Luke 21:5-19 (read it!)***

The disciples looking at the magnificent structure of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem were very impressed. It was well built and had stood for 100s of years already in their day. If you have ever seen pictures or renditions of the Temple it was impressive.

But Jesus says to them not one stone will be left upon another. In other words, it will come to an end. It will be no more. Jesus of course was right. It did come to a crushing end in 70 AD or CE which stands for the Common Era.

There was a revolt and the Roman Army came with full force and leveled it. All that remains today of the great Temple is the foundation or what is called the Temple Mount, which I saw two years ago on my trip to the Holy Land.

It has never been rebuilt over the course of 2,000 years and I believe never will be even though there are people and money ready to do it today.

The point being that Jesus continues to say that over the course of time there will be wars and insurrections. Nations will rise against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms. There will be earthquakes and famines and plagues.

And Jesus said that his followers will be arrested, persecuted, put in prison betrayed by parents and brothers, relatives and friends, and some will be put to death all because they are Christians.

Jesus was right again. All these things have happened in the past and continue to this day in parts of the world. And yet Jesus also says, by your endurance you will gain your souls. By your endurance you will gain your souls. (verse 19)

Not in our gospel reading verses for today, but later Jesus goes on to say, ***do not fear, but persevere*** for all these things must take place before he will return.

***Do not fear but persevere!*** This too is our calling as followers of Jesus. Again whether we see things today as bleak or bright our calling as followers of Jesus has not changed. ***Do not fear but persevere!***

***Persevere in the faith trusting that God is still God. God always has been and God always will be. The arc of God’s Will revealed in scripture over the course of time and history is an arc bent toward justice and healing, peace and new life.***

Nothing goes unnoticed by God. And God is at work bringing about God’s good will. Sometimes it is immediate, sometimes over time, sometimes it’s hidden and sometimes plain to see.

We humans can and do get in the way of God’s work and will and cause problems. Sometimes we actually help accomplish what God desires. We may not know or understand when this happens, but we can trust that God has things in hand.

***Do not fear, but persevere!***

In light of our approaching commemoration of the 500th year of the Reformation I will concluded with a quote by Martin Luther who himself lived in very challenging times of change.

Luther in 1524 said, “Since the property, honor and life of the whole city (the land) has been committed to the faithful keeping (of the council and authorities), they would be remiss in their duty before God and (people) if they did not seek its welfare and improvement day and night with all the means at their command.”

Luther believed that God was an active God, always at work for the benefit of all people. And Luther believed that God exercised authority through two distinct arenas and toward two particular ends.

The first arena was the spiritual one, and God worked through the church to make sure that all people knew of God’s love, grace and mercy in Christ and so had peace of heart in this world and eternal life in the next.

The second arena Luther called the “temporal” one – the world of our immediate and physical needs of this time and place – and God means of caring for our temporal needs is through the family and the government.

For Luther, these two units, family and government were similar in function – to care for those under their charge and responsibility. They only differed in scale.

The household cared for children, grandparents, servants (if any) and guests. This was the local agent of care.

The government was the broader, community or society agent of care with the responsibility of tending to the needs of the larger society. Luther saw the government in a sense as “Parents at Large” working and caring for the needs of people especially the most vulnerable just as parents of a household care for their vulnerable children and aged grandparents.

If Martin Luther were with us today in the context of our post-election I think he would say:

1. Hold government accountable for the care of its citizens and remind office-holders of their God-given responsibility to care for all and particularly those who are most vulnerable.
2. Imagine that those citizens with whom they may disagree still seek the welfare of the people and world and therefore engaged in ***civilized debate*** about policies and programs that affect people’s welfare and;
3. Hold all our leaders in prayer because acting in the interest of the larger society takes courage and conviction, responsibility and vision. Good government takes a lot of hard work and all have a responsibility to contribute themselves to that end.

May this be so and may God’s good will be done.

Amen