Pentecost 26C Luke 21:5-19 Nov 13, 2016

If I was a lay person, a member of the laity -- laity, by the way simply means people; ordinary people – I would expect my parson, which, remember, means person – on the first Sunday after electing a, to say the least, controversial president – to say something about the election.

The parson has been thinking all week about this. He knows that the church can’t operate in a parallel universe, but must be very engaged with the things of the world. So he knows he must say something so that he is not so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good. He cannot just talk about Jesus and faith in a vacuum isolated from the real events of the world.

But the parson knows that his business is faith, not politics. And that people have been saturated with political pundits punditing 24-7 about politics. But also, that faith has a great deal to do with politics, because faith is about life, real life in the world.

The parson knows that the country is divided -- 50-50. So he assumes there is political division in his parish. So he knows to be careful to not say stupid things that would be construed as unfairly partisan.

The parson’s life is not lived hidden in the parsonage, but in the world, and he has gotten an earful from many this week and this last 12 months about politics. The parson, as a person, has some political opinions. But the parson as priest knows that lay people, people people, don’t come to church for political advice but faith proclamation.

The parson is very familiar with a book called the Old Testament, filled with words about and by prophets. Prophets proclaimed the word of God. Prophets proclaim truth. And when a prophet proclaimed truth, he was often dismissed, ignored, tarred and feathered, jailed, or killed. At least not liked. God needs prophets to speak a hard word. The parson knows that it is not easy to speak prophetic words, it is easier to play it safe, sing kum ba ya, to say things easy on the ear.

The parson values diversity, but wonders how diverse can we be before we lose who we are. Is every viewpoint Christian? Can the parson proclaim a prophetic word and say ‘no!” ---This is not Christian.

And although the parson heard a fellow parson boldly proclaim, “God’s kingdom is not of this world,” and, “we answer to a higher power than the president,” this parson knows that there is a sliver of truth to this, but only a sliver, because it is a pie in the sky mentality that makes us not care about what happens on this earth but only that one day I get to heaven where everything will be peachy keen.

 So the parson begins…..

With re-reading today’s Prayer of the Day, which is prophetically timely. “O God, protector of all who trust in you, without you nothing is strong, nothing is holy. Embrace us with your mercy, that with you as our ruler and guide, we may live through what is temporary without losing what is eternal, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.”

Without you nothing is holy….and that we may live through what is temporary without losing what is eternal. Those are words of truth.

Also, as a backdrop, is our very apocalyptic reading from Luke’s gospel, which is also timely and prophetic, as it seems like we are living in apocalyptic times. Indeed, nations are rising against nations, and kingdoms against kingdoms. And might we add, Americans against Americans, because if you say anything about the elections, you must see how divided we have become. Not to mention earthquakes, famines and plagues. It feels like we are living in what Luke described as the end times.

Perhaps an interpretation of the temple in our reading is a metaphor for America – “adorned and beautiful,” but the days will come when it will be destroyed. Many feel that day has come. At least the presidential debates were highly apocalyptic, weren’t they?

So the parson has 4 points to make today. Please don’t leave or quit listening until I say amen.

First, without wavering, without qualifying or explaining, the character, language, and actions of Donald Trump throughout the campaign was deplorable. As a Christian, I cannot do what many have done and respond by saying it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t make a difference. Indeed, what a person says and does matters greatly. The simple line that concluded last week’s reading says it all: “do to others as you would have them do to you.” Actions and words are the things we have to express ourselves, our beliefs, our feelings about others.

What you say matters; and if you are in leadership, what you say carries authority and permission. Here is a report I got from one of our schools: on Wednesday morning, a boy says to a girl of darker skin, “now that the elections are over you better get on your knees and help build the wall.” Donald Trump made it OK to bully. We must not ignore, but denounce fully his language and behavior.

Second point: the gospel of Jesus Christ is always aware of and focused on the weak, vulnerable, outcast, outsider, the have nots. That is what motivates us in this church to spend so much time, energy and money on the hungry, homeless, battered. Throughout the Campaign, Donald Trump disparaged women, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Muslims, and people with disabilities.

Trump’s attitude does not threaten me – I am white, male, straight, and married. But I am called by Christ to put myself in the position of one who is not so privileged – those are the ones who are threatened.

The President of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service of the ELCA was so alarmed by the elections that she sent an email to all churches to assure us that Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service stands by its mission to protect and welcome refugees to our homeland, especially at a time when the world is facing the largest global refugee crisis since WWII.

Third point. When we read the stories in the Bible – the Bible is filled with stories – we see the Bible as what theologians call “the mirror of existence.” Reading a story in the Bible is like looking at your reflection. So, when we read the story of the prodigal son, the purpose is not to remove ourselves from the story and condemn the flaws of the son. But it is to ask, “how am I like that prodigal? How do I see myself in this son?” And when we read of the woman at the well who was caught in adultery, our response is not to condemn her for her sin, but to ask, how am I like that woman – weak, sinful, and flawed.

I believe that both of the candidates – Donald and Hillary – are, in a sense, a mirror of our existence. In them, we see our reflection. We selected them to be what we want them to be. We see ourselves in them – our beliefs, our values, our convictions. They give voice and traction to who we are.

Might I suggest that beyond condemning both of them for their long trails of misbehaviors, that we see in them a reflection of our own sin. Our favorite condemnation of Hillary was President Bill Clinton’s foibles with Monica Lewinsky. He fell from grace. Hillary has been stained by that. We condemn that. We didn’t leave it in the past.

 And often what we most deeply condemn in others is something that is a powerful reality in our own lives. That if we are honest, we see in the sin of Bill Clinton our own sin of lust and desire for the forbidden. Jimmy Carter, the most devout Christian president I’ve had, confessed that – his hidden lust, that he never acted on. He was condemned for his sheer vulnerable honesty. But he spoke truth.

I think what Christians ought to be doing is to understand how that which is most offensive to us about Donald or Hillary might indeed be one of our own demons.

I believe what God is calling this country to, and calling Donald and Hillary to, and calling us to – is confession. A corporate confession on how in so many ways our country has gone astray because of our greed for power, and for things to consume cheaply. A confession of how many of our young people we have sacrificed to preserve our way of life. Do people die on the battlefield so that we can have Kripsy Kreame and Chick Fillet and Buffalo wings and Wal-Mart’s on every corner? Is that our way of life?

Wouldn’t it be something if Donald Trump began his presidency in confession for how he demeaned so many people during the campaign?

At least in the liturgy of the church, we try to be honest and truth telling, as we begin every worship in confession: we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. Confession is truth telling. Confession is admission of guilt; it is an awareness of our humanity.

And my 4th point … I walked into a local gathering spot on Wednesday to do ministry – I knew there would be friends there who are not church people, and I felt a need to do some witnessing to them on behalf of the church. They like me because I’m the only pastor they know, and I can climb mountains and ride bikes as fast as they can. The first question they asked me: “how could Christians vote for Trump?” And indeed, 81% of evangelicals voted for Trump. In their minds, Trump’s persona was so against the Christian persona. People outside of the church do not have a favorable viewpoint of Christians.

Here is the greatest challenge for us Christians at this time in history: we need to be a very specific presence in the world. We need, with great clarity, to vividly live out our faith in our daily lives. And it is an expression of faith that is diametrically opposed to the dark characteristics of Trump and of the rhetoric of evangelical Christians.

We carry a great burden and responsibility.

We can never tire of working for justice on behalf of the least among us; we can never tire of working for peace in a world that threatens to bludgeon our enemies.

We can never tire of offering hospitality to those without anything – hope, safety, food, home.

We must live out compassion. Compassion is to suffer with those who suffer.

We must exude love for others, for all, for enemies, in a world filled with hate. It is not, for example that the political parties disagree with each other, it is now hate for the other. Hate for people who are different from yourself. Hate for all Blacks, gays, Muslims, women. We must love.

We must be humble, in a world that admires bravado and narcissism.

We must even have the courage, when we hear a conversation that is not rooted in truth or love, to confront.

As a parson, I feel like saying, ‘boy are we in a political mess, I’m going to step aside and let them figure out the politics.”

But in my world, in our personal individual lives, it matters greatly how you live out your faith in the world – how you act, what you say, how you treat others, even how you move on from election day.

We are called to live as Jesus lived. In the apocalyptic reading from Luke, Jesus says basically – hang in there, do a long obedience in the same direction, keep faithful, keep believing, and by your endurance you will save your soul.

And again, from the Prayer of the Day, our path is to live through what is temporary without losing what is eternal. Stay focused on Christ. Keep centered on Christ. Allow the love and peace of Christ rule your heart, mind, tongue and feet. And live it out. Show Christ to the world.