

13 November 2022: Luke 21 5-19 (Proper 28)

We have almost survived another season of political exaggeration, character assassination, and dire warnings of apocalyptic disaster if ‘the other party’ wins. Of course, there is a bit more political theatre as the Rev. Warnock and Mr. Walker vilify each other, spending millions in the process. If you think I am jaded and cynical—you are correct. Sometimes someone attempts to probe my political affiliation. I have come to reply, “Politically, I’m Amish.” I mean no disrespect to the Amish. I merely want to convey that I place little hope in political solutions. Government is necessary; just, enforceable laws are required; the aims of political parties are not irrelevant. However, as a follower of Jesus, who takes the Scriptures seriously and wants to live the Truth revealed, there is a higher loyalty than partisan politics. I pray for our leaders—for their safety, for wisdom, discernment, perseverance. However, politics is about power—who has it, how they got it, what they’re doing with it, and what they are doing to retain and get more of it. Political power is addictive, grasping, insatiable.

There is an insidious trap with political partisanship. As Christians we are to live the Faith, and stand against falsehood, wrong, duplicity, greed, destruction, inequality, corruption, and so much more, wherever, in whomever they manifest. We are to practice honesty, integrity, forbearance, mercy, forgiveness, respect, and love in all our affairs. Partisanship demands we look the other way, make excuses, rationalize when one of ‘my’ politicians, or ‘my’ party is in the wrong. At the least we are expected to observe unholy silence. When politics is more important than living the Faith, we are in the wrong. The Russian dissident and exile, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in his Harvard Commencement address in 1978, with the Cold War raging, said that we must look neither to the East—that is to Socialism—nor to the West—to capitalism—for the betterment of humanity. We must look up, said Solzhenitsyn, to God’s Truth. In my mind Solzhenitsyn was a prophet. One way to distinguish a false prophet is that true prophets are not partisan: prophets stand for what is right, just, and true in all circumstances; prophets denounce wrong wherever, with whomever it is found; prophets make everyone angry.

What this has to do with today’s Gospel? Here goes: We can become so captivated by the ‘signs of our times,’ and hoped-for solutions, that we lose faith-perspective. Jesus speaks of the “end-times,” and there is an obvious paradox, as with all ‘end-times’ passages: the signs are stunningly imprecise, so vague as to be useless for prediction: *wars and insurrections...great earthquakes...in various places famines and plagues...dreadful portents...great signs from heaven.* Every generation endures such ‘signs.’

The progression of Jesus’ warnings moves from the universal to the personal. He begins with cosmic, global, international, and national events and ends with family and individuals: followers will be betrayed by family and friends, even by parents and siblings. He says Christians will be persecuted, tortured, killed. Again, in every age Christians have endured such things—including today.

Most paradoxically, Jesus says such is just the beginning of the end times, with hazy indication of how long the beginning of the end lasts. All these ‘signs’ point to an inescapable conclusion: we are not to know the chronology of God’s salvation; to attempt such a pursuit takes us down an endless rabbit hole. In Matthew 24:36 Jesus says *only the Father* knows when; in Mark 13:32, the same point is made (cf. Acts 1:6-7). The ancients were not naïve about the prevalence of war, civil unrest, violence, disasters, epidemics, or astrological phenomena. The ‘signs’ Jesus gives point to this: forget prognostication, be faithful today; mortal life is chaotic, violent, temporary, live your faith in God’s eternal, loving-kind mercy now, and endure through all life’s struggles and tragedies. It’s not the signs that are important: your faith is what matters.

He says, *by your endurance you will gain your souls* (19). The ‘end’ is not on a calendar, but an encounter touching on the most intimate levels of our lives. We are to live expectantly but never presume to know the mind of God. Do not hope for salvation in human institutions. Endure, endure, endure in faith: trust God, follow Jesus, be strengthened by the Holy Spirit. The word “endurance” in Greek is emphatic; gaining one’s soul—living one’s true-identity as a Jesus follower—is “holding fast” no matter the cosmic, global, political, or personal environment. Live God’s Truth in every context and relationship; stand fast, persevere, never give up, never give in, hope in God, endure.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all morals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.