

A Terrible No Good Very Bad Day

November 17, 2019

Rev. Anne Fisher, Oak Grove Presbyterian

Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 21:5-19

When you preach from the Common Lectionary, which is the suggested scriptures that cycle in a three-year rotation, the context of what is happening in the world can be eerily congruent with the passages that they suggest. Three years ago, Sunday, November 13, 2016 when these scriptures were suggested was the first Sunday following the 2016 election. Now, three years later, I face you this day with our country still terribly divided. I face you with impeachment hearings that are taking up all the oxygen in the space, and where there does not seem to be any kind of consensus. I face you in yet another election and we have no unity. We live in the uncertainty of how much influence a foreign power has over our elections and the unease of how self-destructive we can be. And like three years ago, these scriptures come when we are facing our extended family and what a tight rope balance of conversation that can be. What are we going to talk about over for Thanksgiving dinner? We are divided and that becomes personal when the division involves those we love.

There are two things we do know in this time and place of our history. First, people perceive things very differently. How many families raised together have such different world views about almost everything? Second there is a prevailing sense of uncertainty and fear over all of us.

Regardless of our political bent we have experienced some very terrible, horrible, very bad days in the intervening three years since these scriptures have been offered as the lessons of the day. Listen to God's Word in the scripture for Luke 21:5-19 and as Jesus predicts the terrible no good very bad days to come.

⁵When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶'As for these things

that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’⁷ They asked him, ‘Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?’⁸ And he said, ‘Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, “I am he!”* and, “The time is near!”* Do not go after them.’⁹ ‘When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.’¹⁰ Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. ¹²But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; ¹⁵for I will give you words* and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your souls.

In this passage in Luke, Jesus is at the heart of the Jewish world, the temple. As he enters you can imagine the beauty and grandeur of the crowning jewel of the Jewish faith. His disciples are remarking on it, “We have arrived, we are here!” The temple in Jerusalem is the spiritual political and economic center of the people of Israel. It is the heart of the people. As always it is a beehive of activity. Remember the Pharisee who was praying loudly and glad he was not like that sinner over there, that tax collector? That happened in the temple. The people giving great sums of money were making a show of it while a lowly widow was giving all she had. That too took place at the temple.

In this glorious Temple, Jesus speaks of its destruction. How could that be, the people must think that a never-failing God is synonymous with this beautiful edifice. What Jesus is saying is unpatriotic, impolitic and

heretical all at once. Whoa, the Temple is where God dwells. It will not be destroyed! His followers are stunned. They have given up so much to follow him. They ask **when**? They must be thinking we must make sure that does not happen. He goes on, oh by the way, before the Temple falls it will be worse! They will be arrested. They will be rejected and betrayed. They may even die because of him! Those who have invested three years with Jesus will have some very terrible horrible very bad days ahead of them. If that was not bad enough, family and friends will turn on them and they might even die at their hands! Being associated with Jesus has gotten serious and downright dangerous.

You must be now thinking right now, “Maybe we should have gone to the 10:45 service to hear Kevin Kling. Not sure we were ready for this kind of news this early on a Sunday morning. Jesus in the center of the Jewish culture is preparing the disciples for things to come and it is not going to be pretty.

And as horrible as it is going to be for these followers, there are some lifelines. And the center of the storm is God. He tells them, you will not be alone, you will not be forgotten.

How do we move from fear to hope? How can we move from the horrible, terrible, very bad day to something more? From the dire predictions of Luke, we turn to the poetry of Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah is also familiar with terrible horrible very bad days. The people of Israel are overcome and overpowered and they face uncertainty and fear. They are at a low point. Listen to the Words of God through the Prophet Isaiah (*Isaiah 65:17-25*):

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or

an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—and their descendants as well. Before they call, I will answer, while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

This new thing is not ushered in by human leadership or governmental decrees. This is God, creator of all who will dry the tears and lengthen lives. Imagine this world where there is safety and grace; a world where kindness is the rule. A world where the wolf and the lamb eating together side by side. God, in these words gives us a glimpse of what is possible. This is a vision that we hold even in the darkest of times.

The words of Isaiah are to a people who know about fear and uncertainty and gives them a vision of what can be. The pain, the despair is not the end, there is more to come that is good and whole. God says I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth so rejoice and be glad. Out of rubble and chaos and fear and disappointment a new thing comes.

That is the hope that is imprinted upon us as people of faith. We believe that there is more than what is presented to us today. As Christians, our hope is made new through Jesus Christ. The same Jesus who tell his disciples that horrible things are going to happen. The same Jesus that says the difficult days won't magically disappear. We have the choice to live in fear and anger or to trust that this is not all there is. What we have today is not all that we have to work with. We are a people of hope living in a cloudy, sometimes dark world but we refuse to let darkness overtake

us. We choose not to live in fear. We can live in faith, because we know who the true victor is, Jesus Christ.

We follow Jesus who tells us to love our neighbor to feed the hungry to help the ones who have no voice. We have not achieved it yet but we have this vision what is possible. Where the wolf and the lamb the hunter and the prey will feed together. We can't do it alone or by our own devises, but God has this vision for us. With God's help, with God's presence, it is possible.

We the church are called upon to set the tone for unity. We can begin by being gentle and kind to each other. We know that we are have very different opinions about almost everything; from our politics to our favorite ice cream. We can care for each other and listen to each other because that is what Christ teaches us. From that we can be curious rather than condemning about our differences. Let us hear where others come from rather than trying to make them see our point of view. We do this because we regard each other, no matter how much we disagree as beloved children of God. Let us be aware of the voices of the most vulnerable. How we respond to the immigrant living in fear. How do we respond to minorities who are recipient of unbridled hate? We as people of faith cannot remain silent, just as those disciples cannot go back to the life before Christ. We are compelled to take initiatives in the ways of justice, to make stands against injustice. In other words, to act like a follower of Christ in all that we do.

We can gather and proclaim Christ as Lord in one voice. Our unity as a people of faith can be a model to invite others to hear that message that we are not alone. From the words of Isaiah, God seeks great things for all of us. Jesus told his disciples who most certainly were shell shocked with the words coming from their leader, don't worry if you are arrested and brought before the powers to be, this is an opportunity to testify, and you will know what to say! In our uncertain world we too have an opportunity to testify, that loving your neighbor is real and difficult and necessary.

I am not sure how many times over the last three years that I have heard the words “we are in an unprecedented time.” Even the experts do not know how to predict the outcome. As Christians in this uncertain time we can look for the places where God is as work here today. What moment do we see as glimpses of God’s vision for us?

We do not know what the days ahead might hold for our country, for all the nations or even for our planet. But although it may seem we are flying without protection of a net under us. We have the best news of all. We will not be forgotten, for we are beloved children of God. In this season as we gather with family and friends, who may see things very differently than us let us keep Isaiah’s vision in mind that it is possible the wolf and the lamb can feed together in peace. And maybe even the terrible, horrible very bad days have moments of true grace and joy. Thanks be to God Amen.