

Texts: Malachi 4:1-2a; Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21: 5-19

We are coming to the end of the church year, and every year the readings around this time turn to the end times, the day of the Lord, the warnings of signs and portents. This passage comes as Jesus is in Jerusalem on his way to the cross. He knows what is going to happen to him, and as he makes his journey to his death, we journey with him.

I have to admit that I do not look forward to preaching on these texts. I am not like some preachers, who enjoy preaching fire and brimstone, that you better watch out or God is going to get you. I am not like some preachers who claim that we should not worry about global warming or about environmental damage because these are signs that the end of days is near. I don't buy that. As this morning's psalm proclaims, all creation sings praise to God. I believe that we have a responsibility to this beautiful planet that God created.

Nowhere does the Bible tell us exactly when and where the end of time will come. Jesus himself says that the Son of Man does not know the day or the hour. But for the past 2,000 years Christians have been trying to figure it out anyway. In today's gospel, Jesus cautions against those who try to predict the future. "Beware that you are not led astray," he warns. "Many will come in my name and say 'I am he,' and 'The time is near!'"

But then things happen. Genocide in Africa. Suicide bombings and mass killings in the Middle East. Hurricanes in the Pacific and the Atlantic – storms that are larger and more destructive than ever.

There is violence and war. Nation does rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There are earthquakes and famines and plagues. Innocent people lose their lives when someone with a gun opens fire. There is fire and drought. Tornadoes and ice storms. Outbreaks of cholera and malaria and polio.

And then there is our own country. Here we are on this side of Election Day. I know that some of you are delighted with Tuesday's results. And some of you are horrified. I will be honest – I am in the latter group. But what saddens me more than anything else is that we have witnessed the most hateful and vicious presidential campaign that any of us can remember. We have witnessed bigotry, lying, slander and scandal pass for political discourse. We have witnessed the destruction of decency, truthfulness, integrity, and tolerance – pillars of a civil society.

As Jesus sits in the temple this morning, he looks around at all the beautiful decorations and claims that not a single stone will be left standing. The temple was the center of the Jewish faith, the place where God resided, the place where faithful people went to offer sacrifices and to worship. But Luke wrote this gospel sometime after the year 70, the year that the Romans did destroy the temple. His audience, the early Christian community, would have seen or known about this disaster firsthand. So Jesus' words this morning are not really a prediction, but more of a reflection on the limits of what human beings think they can achieve on their own. Jesus' words this morning – about war and disaster, famine, plague, signs in the heavens – these are examples of apocalyptic imagery. When people are so downtrodden that they cannot see any relief from their suffering, they begin to wish for some kind of cataclysm that will destroy everything so that the world can begin anew.

What are we to do in the face of the evil we see around us? The xenophobia, the hatred, the bullying, the division? We are to confront it. We are to name it. Jesus tells us in the Gospel this morning that we have an opportunity to testify. That is amazing good news. In the face of everything that is going on, Jesus instructs you to tell what God has

done and is doing in your life. Testimony is not the story of your own attempts to overcome some kind of impossible circumstance. Testimony is the story of God's work. Giving testimony is a way to cope with grief. Giving testimony is a powerful way to confront the lies our culture would have us believe by telling the truth about God's love. Giving testimony builds community because when we know each other's stories, we are less likely to judge each other. Giving testimony is an act of peacemaking in a world of violence.

We have already heard Laurie give her testimony this morning. And now it is your turn. Find someone sitting nearby and take a few minutes to tell each other what your earliest memory is of hearing about Jesus...

It's an awesome experience, isn't it? To tell someone else a little bit of your story. To hear their story. Did it feel like you were confronting evil? Well you were. And in a few minutes we will do something else to confront evil. We will share the peace of Christ with each other. Passing the peace is not about a friendly greeting and an exchange of pleasantries. Passing the peace of the Lord is a powerful act of reconciliation. It is an act of peacemaking in a world of violence.

And then after we are reconciled, we will share this meal, the one that our Lord commands us to eat, the one that our Lord provides for us, made out of bread and wine, fruits of the earth. Made of the body and blood of the One who went to the cross and spoke words of forgiveness as he died. We share this meal standing before this altar, standing next to people that we have known our entire lives and people that we don't know at all. We share this meal with people who grew up in the same town, and with those who came from other places. We share this meal with people who think like we do and with people

who disagree with us. We share this meal together because it is an act of peacemaking in a world of violence.

Today you can smell the turkey warming up downstairs. Because today, after we eat this meal, we will walk out these doors and share our bounty with this community. Today we are hosting a feast. Tomorrow we will host a feast once again, as we take the rest of the food to Closer to Home. And each and every day we give food to people in this town who are hungry. On Thursday, we shipped 135 quilts to Lutheran World Relief, and with those quilts we confront evil in this world. Those quilts are tangible, physical signs of peace in a world of violence.

We can hear Jesus' words today as a warning. We can try to figure out the timetable for the end of time and agonize over whether or not we have mended our ways enough to be ready. Or we can hear Jesus' words as an invitation to gather together in the face of the world's evil and testify to the power of the resurrection. We are people who are linked to the name of Jesus Christ – past, present and future. We are people who live every day in the promise that life *will* rise from death, that the day of the Lord *will* come and the cause of evil will no longer prosper.

The hymn we are about to sing echoes this promise. The words are based on another passage from Luke – on the Magnificat, the song that Mary sang as she was pregnant with Jesus. Listen to the words as you sing them: Though the nations rage from age to age, we remember who holds us fast: God's mercy must deliver us from the conqueror's crushing grasp.

Come and eat. And then go and testify. Go and witness to the promise that God has given you in Jesus Christ. In our words and our deeds, in our testimony and passing of the

peace, in the feast we eat and the feast we offer, this is the truth that we proclaim today:

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.