

November 17, 2019

Luke 21:5-19

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

I can't help but hear echoes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Ecclesiastes upon reading this morning's lessons. You know Ecclesiastes 3: For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. The author then goes on to list various circumstances in which there is a time, such as: a time to be born, a time to die, a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance, a time to seek, a time to lose, a time to love, a time to hate. What I hear in these words is the vast gamut of seasons of life the people of God experience and endure. Just verses later, the author states, "He [God] has made everything suitable for its time." Everything under heaven falls within the realm of the world God has created and happens in God's time. Amid these happenings, some good and some bad, some pure and some evil, some with causation and some without, the people of God, in the second to last verse of the book, are called to keep God's commandments. This is the will of God.

"Do love. Be love. Give love. Love one another." You will see these 9 words written in large and colorful letters hanging in the fellowship hall downstairs. They are taken from a song the kids that so faithfully gather Wednesday evenings to learn and grow in their relationship with Jesus and one another sung this past week. Of course, those last 3 words "Love one another" are spoken directly by Jesus where, in the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John's gospel, he states, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13:34-35)

And so, that's what we do. That's what we are called to do. Love one another. Love our neighbors as ourselves. Love even our enemies. Love those different than us. Love those we don't understand. Love those we disagree with. Love those who make our blood boil. Love those who have hurt us. Do love. Be love. Give love. Love one another.

Christian freedom, that is new life in Christ, no longer held to the bondage of sin and death is one lived in celebration of this good news and in sharing this good news and this love of Christ with one another. That ethos is part of our congregation's mission statement, that our life in Christ and our life together and growth in relationship with him culminates in "celebrating the love of Christ by reaching out to others."

It's straight forward and simple! Or, at least it would seem to be. Yet, things get in the way and our minds often get distracted. Life happens and we can all too easily get consumed with trying to figure out why they do happen. Like the disciples we may get caught up in determining if in fact Jesus' return is near. Like some in the church of Thessalonica we may give way to the temptation to sit idle and even, as a better interpretation may be, disrupt the mission and work of our fellow brothers and sisters who also may have deemed Christ's return was imminent. The time is near, so they thought. Jesus surely won't be gone long. He will come again to usher in the new kingdom of heaven. Paul's words are ones of encouragement and direction for them and for us today of how to live in the time between Christ's resurrection and Christ's return.

In the face of apocalyptic texts about the end times, which often seem so foreign to us, it seems there are two things we can do just as there are two things we can do in the face of all the crap that goes on in our world today. In the face of political division and unrest. In the face of yet another heinous act done with a weapon that all too easily can and did take the lives of innocent students and ultimately his own as well. In the face of impeachment hearings. In the face of the earth's temperature on the rise and natural disasters increasing in scope and magnitude. In the face of millions forcibly displaced from their homeland due to violence and persecution and left with nowhere to go. In the face of millions struggling to secure safe water to drink and food to sustain their weary bodies. In the face of a church on the decline, shrinking budgets, and the challenge of so many to keep their doors open and a pastor in the pulpit. In the face of whatever it is each of us is experiencing right now.

In the face of all this we can sit idle and do nothing or we can act. We are the church. Together. We are disciples of Jesus Christ. Together. We are called. Together. We have a mission – God’s mission. Together. We have work to do. Together. That’s at the heart of Jesus’ message. That’s at the heart of Paul’s letter. In the face of uncertain times and the powers of evil that threaten to lead us away from belief and trust in the foundation of our faith. Jesus Christ was born. Jesus Christ died. Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Jesus Christ will come again. There is a time. No, this is the time to profess and proclaim this good news!

This is the opportunity to proclaim death will not have the last word. This is the time to stand up, love our neighbor and say racism has no place in the kingdom of God and words of hatred and intolerance are sin. This is the time to love all God has created and stand alongside the whole creation that has been groaning (Romans 8:22) and in desperate need of us being faithful and loving stewards of God. This is the time to love one another by standing with one more child whose life was cut too short by a weapon of death. This is the time to love our neighbor by forgiving our neighbor who wounded us. This is the time to pray for our enemy who hates us. This is the time to set aside bickering and personal agendas and simply “celebrate the love of Christ by reaching out to others.”

This is the time to come to the font. Come to the table. Come to the Word of God. Come to worship. Come together. Be fed. Be nourished. Be filled. Be strengthened. Be given new life. Be forgiven. Be saved by Jesus Christ. Be healed by his grace. Be clothed in his innocence. Be freed ... to do love. Be love. Give love. Love one another. This is the time, Jesus asks of us, to give testimony that this is God’s world. This is God’s time. In all things, in all seasons, and in all times, God is alive and at healing the hurts, calming the storms, feeding the hungry, rescuing the oppressed, and bringing life to all places in which there is death. God is good! God is love! Jesus is risen! Jesus is Lord! Alleluia!