

**Twenty Six Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish**  
**Saint Francisville, LA**  
**13 November 2016**

**Luke 21:5-19**

This has been a week of restlessness and discomfort in America, a week that shows us how divided we have become as a nation. And it is very normal to be filled with anxiety and worry about the future of our nation and the future of our children. Many are wondering if our divisions are a sign of the beginning of the end. Some have looked at history and have realized that most great empires are not toppled down from the outside, but, rather they seem to implode from within. Their citizens turn against each other, factions develop as different groups or parties seek to have more power and more advantage, and little by little the institutions that provided a sense of security and progress begin to erode. Justice becomes compromised, our common humanity devolves into inhumanity, and eventually the center will not hold and destruction ensues. Many in America believe we have arrived at this point and America will lose the strategic advantage it has had for nearly a century now.

I believe the reading for today from Luke gives us some hope and a way forward. Now, you may be wondering if I finally lost it. After all, the reading from Luke 21 today says things like, “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... Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.” How can these words provide any hope at all?

The hope comes in the very reason why apocalyptic writings take place to begin with. Even though the language is quite futuristic, the purpose of Apocalyptic language in Scripture is the present and not the future. In this type of language, as you see in the book of Revelation, you see a group of people who are suffering in the present. They are being persecuted and they are filled with anxiety. They believe the end has come and God has somehow abandoned them. They try hard to see God in their midst, but they are quite unable to do so. All they see is corruption, violence, insurrection, wars, famine, and death. Apocalyptic literature tries to explain why these things are happening and it usually answers the “why?” by saying, “This is happening because the world is under evil powers who afflict the faithful.” This is the explanation. What we are experiencing is the result of evil forces who have placed personal gain and the advancement of personal agendas first for far too long, and their behaviors have caused all the suffering and pain we see today.

After explaining the reasons why the present suffering is taking place, Apocalyptic language offers a future reversal of fortunes. It promises that those who suffer now

will one day be rewarded and that those who bring suffering to others will suffer themselves. God is merciful and just and he will uphold the cause of the poor. He will care for those who are the victims of the machinations of the evil. He will vindicate those who suffer and will provide for them a different world. In the mean time, the godless and the unrighteous will be judged and they will pay the consequences for their behaviors.

After presenting a future reversal of fortunes, by saying things like, “Those who endure will be saved” or “To those who endure will be given a crown of glory”, apocalyptic language gets to the real point of what it is trying to do. The purpose of these types of writings are to encourage people to continue their faithfulness and patience, even in the midst of the present suffering. It encourages them to produce fruits worthy of the children of God. It motivates them to a fully active life of wakeful expectation for the return of our savior. It charges us to continue doing the work God has given us to do, in season and out of season, knowing that God will bless our efforts and our endurance.

Let me tell you the story of a humble man who lived during one of these apocalyptic times and let me invite you to the type of lifestyle he lived. The Roman Empire fell in the West in the year 476 after the last Roman emperor was dethroned by German invaders. These were fierce giants with painted faces who destroyed everything in their path and killed thousands as they entered towns and cities. 4 years later, in the small town of Nursia, in Italy, a young boy was born who would change the church and world for ever. His name was Benedict. He grew up at a time of great chaos as different invaders fought to fill the power vacuum left vacant by the demise of the great empire. There was violence, corruption, pillaging, death, and suffering everywhere. Worse yet, the eyes and minds of all people were consumed with worries about their countries and the fate of the city of Rome. The popular saying of the day was that “As Rome goes, so goes the Empire.” If Rome fell, the Empire would fall. To many, the end of the empire meant the death of the church and Western civilization.

In the midst of all of this, Benedict decided to turn his attention from the macro fears and concerns about Rome, Church, and Empire and to reconnect with the local community. He gathered around himself a small group of men and decided to create a small community, organized around a very simple rule. The basic two tenants of this rule are “Ora et Labora” which we can translate as “Pray and Work”. And this is what the monks did. They began to pray constantly, and, at an age when the nobility did not work, these monks, many of them children of the nobility, rediscovered the power and the blessings of physical labor. Soon, their community became known as the most loving place in town. The monks truly loved each other and seemed to be quite happy in their communal life, in contrast to the great unhappiness and chaos in the outside world. Their style of life was so attractive that soon other communities began to form and within a century there were thousands of Benedictine monasteries around the known world of the day.

And little by little, the monks began to work for the betterment of the communities in which they lived, feeding the poor, rebuilding destroyed churches, educating the sons of the

nobility, advancing knowledge and culture through the manual copying of manuscripts, taking care of widows and orphans, etc. In a time of chaos and anarchy, Benedict and his friends turned to the local community and discovered in that community a sense of mission and purpose. And this new mission and purpose changed the world for ever.

This is the real purpose of apocalyptic writings. To encourage us to endure in our faith and to redirect us to a new sense of mission and purpose. This mission and purpose has to be found here in this local community. Our minds and hearts have to be turned away from the anxieties and worries of the macro-politics of the day, and towards our own microcosm of West Feliciana Parish. Regardless of how much division there is out in the world, we must not let that rhetoric destroy and divide us. Regardless of how much hatred there is in our society, we can not devolve into hatred, discrimination, name calling, or racism. Regardless of how much selfish grandiosity and power grabbing we may see at the state and federal level, we must resolve to care for the most vulnerable in our communities. We must make a decision to live as Christians in a secular world. We must choose to be light in a world of darkness. We must make a decision to love each other as much as God loves us in Jesus Christ our Savior. We must rediscover our humanity and Christian love of neighbor.

God is giving us a unique call today. This call is to unite, to build bridges, to care and love the other. This call is to create community and to pray and work together. To create such a loving community that other communities will want to replicate our model and will want to do the same. We are called to be examples of what a Christ-centered church looks like. Today God is calling us to be ambassadors of civility and respect. To see humanity under other people's skin and to love that humanity as Christ loves that humanity. So, don't worry too much about Washington and the world out there. For now, let us resolve to endure in our faith and to do the work God has given us to do here and now. God will take care of his world, the most we can do right now is to pray and to care for each other. Have hope and have faith. God is in control and with him in our lives loving and caring for the other is possible. The really good news this week is that when we went to bed on Tuesday evening God was on his throne as Lord of Lords and God of Gods. And when we woke up on Wednesday morning, God was still on his throne and remained in charge of history.

God loves us in incredible ways. Let us hold firm to our humanity and let us build the type of community our grandchildren will be proud of. May our descendants say some day, "Our grandparents dealt with the crisis of the 21 century by creating the most loving community this State has ever seen. They reconnected with their faith and they endured in their mission to love God and to love others. We survived as an intact and prosperous church and town because they prayed and worked together to build our community." May someone write on our tombstones someday, "They prayed and worked together, and God did the rest!" Amen.