

SERMON- Proper 28 (C)

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Isaiah 65:17-25

Canticle 9

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

November 13, 2022

Luke 21:5-19

OPENING:

It was 6 years ago this Sunday, and because we are on a 3 year cycle, this same lesson had just been read from Year C, Proper 28,

I was a seminarian, set to preach at our Field Ed Placement site, and I had preached one total sermon before in my life ever.

I was nervous, all over the place. I had so little experience and barely knew the congregation.

THEN that Tuesday before that Sunday's sermon... something happened.

You all remember it, of course: November 2016, the candidate that people thought was going to win the Presidency did not, the other one did instead.

So everything was in flux and...

I kept waiting for my Field Education supervisor, my boss, to take the preaching task away from me. That was happening to other seminarians at other churches, the experienced clergy would let them off the hook or, at least, vet the text prior to.

Instead, nothing.

Again it was the lesson that I just read:

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.

What do you say?

The Diocese sent guidelines that particular Sunday, by the way, which it never does, reminding preachers to remind folks that the lessons are indeed baked in long before any of this happens. Proper 28, Year C, is no respecter of our election timeline. And they talked about Pastoral sensitivity around politics and the Anglican view of the separation of church and state.

But still I sat there, I felt so small and scared about this sermon, and meanwhile our country was going through everything it was going through 6 years ago this week.

THIS WEEK:

On Tuesday we had another Election, and here I am to preach another sermon. Same lectionary, same country, different election cycle, different church,

In the meantime, I have had 6 years of this under my belt. I did the math: I have preached some 230 sermons in those 6 years.

Still, what do you say about this lesson?

Jesus and his disciples are approaching the Temple at Jerusalem, Jesus gives an apocalyptic portrait of what the end will look like for his own life and for his disciples. It's a grim picture... maybe it's metaphorical... maybe... there is also something that just sounds prophetically prescient about it all: plagues, civil strife, persecutions...

What do you say?

One thing I have learned in the previous 6 years is that I simply cannot keep up with the news cycle. I know that many people want their preachers to be able to have the rapid response capability of TV talking heads and Op-Ed writers. I am simply not that fast, and I don't have producers in my ear helping me.

I found this out the hard way about 4 years ago, giving a sermon one random Sunday, I was preaching about... Mr. Rogers, the beloved PBS kid's show figure, who was in the news for a Netflix documentary about his life.

After the service, a member of the church came up and gave it to me, how I should have spoken about the shooting that had happened in Pittsburgh the day before, this was the shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue shooting in 2018. The shooting happened on a Saturday, during Shabbat services, I did not mention it in my remarks.

Later, I learned that the shooting happened literally in Mr. Rogers' neighborhood, and so with just a little tweak I could have said something about violence and civility or something. Instead, with my one-year-old child in my arms and my wife standing next to me, this parishioner lit into me for my failure.

ST. PAUL'S

Back to my fateful 2016 Presidential election sermon: The one thing of substance that I said as I stood in front of the congregation at St. Paul's Alexandria was "this all had happened before." 150 years earlier, the clergy of St. Paul's decided to not include the name of the President of the United States (Abraham Lincoln), in the prayers. The officiant was challenged by Union troops with swords and pistols drawn, he refused and so was marched off to captivity. There is even the story that the arresting party was bombarded with a hymnal thrown by choir member from the

balcony.

I compared that scene from the 1860's to the present-day: to say that some might be thinking that sort of thing might happen again. If your candidate lost, you might have been hoping that it happened. If your candidate won, you can easily imagine the scenario. It did not, but feelings were raw, as I am sure they were here and throughout the Church that Sunday 6 years ago.

Is it overly dramatic to compare the events of our time with that of an actual Civil War? Maybe. On the other hand, we hear the Gospel and Jesus' words: about persecutions and natural disasters and political terrorism and we also say "Yeah, sounds about right."

I survived that Sunday. As a seminarian, you get a lot of grace, and likewise as an Associate you get some as well, although COVID did no one in any favors on that front.

Here I am as your Priest-in-Charge, hoping to manage that balance. And I will venture this:

Politics ARE important, elections ARE important, who we elect IS important. But I have preached about the "real world" before and I would like to venture that that importance is always relative, it's always limited.

Preaching and the church should somehow recognize that somehow.

BARTH:

So here's another story, about another election and another sermon response to one: This is from the 1930s in Germany, and please know I am NOT drawing straight lines between this election and the 2016 Election or our most recent election. Please know that.

Anyway, Karl Barth, the famous theologian was a University/ Seminary professor in Germany and he had been told that Adolf Hitler had just won the election to the position of Chancellor of Weimar Germany.

Barth's students came in the next day to class and asked Dr. Barth what they should preach, how they should act, what they should do because of this election

Barth answered that they should:

"(Act) As if nothing happened"

Karl Barth said

"Tell that little man in Berlin, Herr Hitler, that he is not Lord of History, the Lord of History is a crucified Jew in Jerusalem."

Barth's point is a difficult word, because the obvious response is that the Church in 1930's Germany, or us in 2020's United States, should have indeed acted like something indeed DID happen. They should have worked harder to prevent the rise of Nazism, to speak out against injustice. You name it.

Still Barth's reaction is worth hearing.

The operating Presumption is that we as Christian need to make the difference in the world.

Rather Christ has already made the difference in the world.

Therefore, It's business as usual in the Kingdom of God.

Barth says: Christians who want to make a difference in the world usually don't know the difference that Christ has already made.

It's Arrogance historically: Christians usually poor and ineffectual, incapable of making any "difference."

All we need to do is bear witness.¹ Which is what Jesus says in our Gospel lesson. Jesus tells us to tell the truth, to testify to God's love, to endure, and to suffer.

"As if nothing happened..."—keep that in your ear as we continue to be consumed by polarization and political demonization

"As if nothing happened"

That reminded me of my Easter sermon that I gave just a couple weeks into my tenure here and I had this line:

That "Easter happened anyway."²

That regardless of our politics, or the COVID status, or what's going on in our church lives, or deep in our souls.

That "Easter happens anyway." I did not come up with that line but it's a powerful statement about God's victory over the forces of death, about our finitude in the grand scheme of things. And how Love wins in the end.

AMEN

¹ ["As if nothing happened" ~ Jason Micheli November 2020](#)

² I first came across the idea of "Easter happens anyway" from the Pulpit Fiction podcast ("Easter A" *Pulpit Fiction Podcast* [Episode 373, April 12, 2020] <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/eastera.>). Later on in the sermon process, the idea seemed everywhere: e.g. Bishop Michael Curry "It feels like winter — but Easter is happening anyway." *Washington Post* (4/10/2020) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/10/we-are-never-alone/?arc404=true#Curry>. Likewise, the idea to concentrate on Easter "fear" was ubiquitous: e.g. Russell Moore. "Easter Fear is Natural" in *Christianity Today* (April 12, 2020) <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/april-web-only/russell-moore-easter-fear-natural.html>.