

Sermon Preached by Pastor Jennifer Rose  
November 13, 2016  
"Is the Sky Falling?"

Dear Friends in Christ: Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Two gas company servicemen, a senior training supervisor and a young trainee, were out checking meters in a suburban neighborhood. They parked their truck at the end of the alley and worked their way to the other end. At the last house a woman looking out her kitchen window watched the two men as they checked her gas meter.

After they finished checking the meter, the senior supervisor challenged his younger co-worker to a foot race down the alley back to the truck to prove that an older guy could outrun a younger one. As they came running up to the truck, they realized the lady from that last house was huffing and puffing right behind them. They stopped and asked her what was wrong. Gasping for breath, she replied, "When I see two gas men running as hard as you two were, I figured I'd better run too!"

We might all feel a little bit on edge just like this woman. The results of the presidential election this week have been enough to make us all feel a little crazy! Some of you, I know, are in a stage of deep grief and mourning about the results of the election. Others of you are cheerful and happy and glad at the results. And still others don't have any opinion at all about the election and don't really care who won.

Whatever side of the election you are at right now - there is a deep and abiding pain that our country is facing right now. Contrary to popular belief, there is no "correct" side - I want to be clear and say that I am not advocating for one side or another side. Much of the pain that people are feeling right now - the pain of division and disunity - began before the election. Some face a great deal of pain because they felt so strongly that Trump was not the right candidate. They had hoped so strongly for a female president - shattering that huge glass ceiling - and felt that President Elect Trump was not the right choice. Still others feel pain from the policies of the last 8 years under President Obama. Perhaps you have really high medical premiums, didn't like Obama care, or felt you were paying too much tax. Others in our country are simply reeling after a vicious and painful election season. The rhetoric by candidates was bad. Seriously, how low can these people go in attacking each other? They call themselves Christians? How can that be possible?

It all points to a simple fact - that our country has deep divisions right now. The question for many of us is kind of a deep ominous one - "Now what?" "What's going to happen?" "Where do we go from here?"

In today's Gospel reading, there were people at the temple, looking at this big, beautiful, ornate building, saying, "look at these beautiful stones." Some of these stones are as big as 30 feet

long and 25 feet thick - these walls are thick and very strong - strong enough that even Bob Villa would probably say, "That's not going anywhere." Jesus' response is very grim. He explains that the temple will fall. I can only imagine what their faces must have been at Jesus' response.

"You think this temple's a big deal?" Jesus tells them. "The time's going to come when this is nothing but a big pile of rocks. Not even a big pile. It's going to be rocks strewn all over the ground. Not a single stone will be piled on top of another stone." Now, to an ancient Jew suggesting that the temple would be destroyed is kind of like showing up at Thanksgiving dinner saying, "This year, instead of having turkey, we are all having TOFURKEY! I thought you'd like it! I made it for the first time today!" You just don't do that. You don't even talk about it. But I think it's important to remember... even before the gospel of Luke was written, the temple had already been destroyed.

Today, in Jerusalem there is a section of the old temple wall that you can still see. In an open air plaza, there is a section of wall, 187 feet long. The stones in that wall are the stones that were there when Jesus and the disciples walked the temple grounds. They were put there during the era of King Herod. To this day, Jews gather to pray before this wall. It's all they have left from the temple. Two thousand years later, men will shed blood to protect those stones. I tell you all this to give you a sense of what kind of impact Jesus must have made when he said what he said. I imagine the disciples looked around in shock to see if any of the other Jews at the temple that day heard what Jesus said. This was a big deal. And then they gathered around him with questions. "When will this happen?"

In response, Jesus gives them this warning. "Watch out. People are going to show up claiming to be me, asking you to follow me. There will be wars and revolutions. There will be earthquakes and famines and terrible signs in the heavens... "And you ... you my followers ... people are going to grab you and throw you in jail and haul you to courts. Your own families are going to turn on you. Some of you will even be killed because you follow me. You are going to be hated because of me. "But don't worry - not a hair on your heads will perish. By your endurance, you will gain eternal life."

It's easy to become very fearful during these times that we live in. These things that Jesus warns about in the Gospel reading today do happen around us. We do see nation rising against nation and famines and plagues. It's easy to become very fearful - to hunker down - or to run around like Chicken little saying "The sky is falling!" But as Christians, our call is to something much more than this.

Our Reading from 2nd Thessalonians today ends with the words "Brothers and Sisters, do not weary in doing what is right." Because we WILL face opposition, perseverance matters. Because the forces of evil WILL place stumbling blocks in our path, perseverance at loving one another matters.

Because our lights will shine in the darkness, reflecting the light of Christ to a hurting, chaotic, and broken world, our perseverance matters.

Because sometimes it seems that there is nothing but death all around us, and the world needs to hear about how Jesus brings life out of death, our perseverance matters.

Jesus says that some will be put to death but not a hair of your head will perish. Those two things don't go together very well. Is he saying that you will look good in your casket? You know he isn't. He is saying that who you are, one who has been created in the very image of God will live forever in God. There is nothing that can separate us from God's love.

This doesn't make life easy. It doesn't mean there are not fearful things in this world. Jesus tells us that in the face of those fearful things, we are reminded that God always brings life out of death. Hate will not win. Love will cast out fear. Hope will hold us beyond the grave. Grace will have its day forever. In the end, beyond all political persuasions, love wins. Remember, whether you are elated or depressed, that God has promised that God will work through whatever governments we have. And maybe more importantly - God will work through the church - through every one of you. God worked through Moses - a murderer - through Abraham - who had major trust issues - and God even works through us, even though we are pretty messed up too.

We do not have to agree on politics to be together in our following of Jesus. We don't have to agree on the right way to achieve social justice. We don't have to agree on methods and philosophies when we confess that Jesus is Lord. And when we agree that Jesus is Lord, we live in the wonder of being the children of God. We are not our own. On the day of our baptism we received the promise - that we belong to God forever. And those promises will sustain us for our whole life.

Isaiah chapter 11 tells us, "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." What do you think it would look like today if the wolf were living with the lamb? In my mind, The democrats and republicans will sit at table together. Those who watch Sean Hannity will dine with those who watch Michael Moore. Hey - even Sean Hannity will dine with Michael Moore. A huge group of viking fans will have a packer fan be their pastor. It all seems too magical to be real.

And yet, it isn't too magical to be real. We can come together as a community of believers around a meal of reconciliation and hope, a meal of love and forgiveness - when we celebrate communion with one another. And we can come together each week as a community of followers of Christ to worship the God who created everything - a God who lowered himself to us as a human being - to be like one of us - a tiny, fragile baby who was born in Bethlehem, who died for us on a cross - a God who died so that all of us, even with our human frailties and our deep seated sin, could see God face to face. May we all remember how deeply God loves us - and how God promises that we are never alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.