

"Words and Wisdom"
Luke 21:5-19

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The Gospel reading this morning is known as an apocalyptic message. Luke has been the Gospel that the lectionary assigned for this past year and we're coming to the end of this cycle. So, we find ourselves listening to a prediction of what feels like the end of time and how God will guide the faithful through the turmoil.

As we begin to reflect on this passage together, it is important to remember that apocalyptic means revelation. We are listening to a passage that reveals and exposes the story of God in the midst of a changing social structure. It is also important to keep our passage in context of the events that were happening in the late 1st century. Remember, the Gospel of Luke was written after the fall of the temple in 70 CE. The social structure, as it had been known, was now in upheaval. The Jews no longer had a central place of worship. They had to learn how to be faithful in a post temple society. Moreover, they were being persecuted. Tensions arose as they reorganized and argued that their way was the right way. Those who followed the Way of Christ caused even more tension as they preached the story of the Messiah. So when Luke writes that nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom and the faithful will be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, he is talking about things that are already happening. It is a hard time to be faithful – there is fear and uncertainty.

In the midst of this story, this tension, Jesus says: "I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict."

It has been a hard week for our nation. After months of an ugly campaign of name calling, finger pointing, and vastly different policy ideas, we recognize that we are a divided nation. People are angry. People are afraid. People are unsure of what will come next. It sounds very much like the story in scripture.

On Tuesday night, or early Wednesday morning, as I lay awake pondering the election results I had a conversation with God. "Ok, Holy One, what do you want me to say? You promise to give words and wisdom. I am listening." What I heard was the message I have heard over and over again throughout my life time. Follow the way of Christ. Be light in the darkness. Be love in the midst of hate. Be compassionate to all those who cross your path regardless of where they stand. Keep an open heart. Keep an open mind. Listen for my way. I am with you.

Early Wednesday morning my phone lit up with messages. My younger sister in New Hampshire texted: "Do you have any words of wisdom this morning?" My youngest daughter, who is in graduate school, called from Chicago. She has two roommates who are residents at the Chicago Children's Hospital. They are brilliant young women and they are both Muslims. They were born in America to immigrant

parents and thought they were living the American dream. Now they are afraid. Margaret said: "Mom, we were watching the results last night and Suzy and Ream were sobbing. What do I say?" A directee came in filled with fear because a twitter feed that she had been watching was lighting up with swastikas and words of white supremacy. "What will you say?" she asked. "How will you preach?" My response was the words and wisdom I heard the night before: Keep being yourselves. Be loving and kind. Be about peace and justice. Be compassionate as our Lord is compassionate. This is The Way of Christ that our faith invites us to – a faith that has spanned over 2000 years and still has a message that is transformative and true.

But our scripture doesn't just stop with words and wisdom. Jesus promises the faithful that they will not perish – but by our endurance to embody this way of love, we will gain our souls.

Many of you know that in September Nancy Murray, our yoga teacher, and I led a group of people to walk The Camino – an ancient Christian pilgrimage in Spain that ends in Santiago de Compostela. For five days we walked 15 miles a day on a path that led us to Santiago. I came up with the idea for the pilgrimage in the fall of 2014, so for a number of years I'd been anticipating this journey. The first two days were lovely. We strolled through the countryside passing farms and tiny villages taking in the history and beauty around us. On the third day, it was pouring rain. The minute I stepped outside I was soaked through – the rain gear I'd brought didn't match the power of the downpour. Sometime mid-morning I found myself walking alone for a few hours. It was wet. I was cold. We were walking through a forested area so it was dark and dreary. All of a sudden from the innermost depth of my being I heard the question: "What am I doing here? What am I doing here?"

At the end of the pilgrimage we arrived in Santiago and to the Cathedral at the top of the hill. At noon the next day we all attended the Pilgrim's Mass. It is a traditional Mass, said in Spanish, that takes place each day to honor the pilgrims who have arrived in Santiago. We found ourselves worshipping in a Cathedral with about 2000 other souls from all over the world. While I knew I wouldn't understand the Mass, I wanted to attend because being there was one of the highlights of the Pilgrimage. As Mass was about to begin, a nun came forward to teach all of us the chants that we would sing. I was surprised that the first one she taught is one of my very favorite Taize chants: Ubi Caritas. There I was, exhausted and weary from our trek, sitting in a huge Cathedral with people, young and old, from all over the world and we were all singing words we knew:

Ubi Caritas et amor
Ubi Caritas Deus ibi est.

Live in charity and steadfast love
Live in charity God will dwell with you.

When Mass started with the chant and I was resting in the beauty of hearing so many people sing these words, I knew exactly why I had come on this journey. When we live in charity and love, God dwells with us. This wisdom has to be passed on from generation to generation. This is the story of truth – not division. Not ugliness. Not hate. Not arrogance. This story of God’s dwelling with us in love and charity rises above all human political systems. It is why we are here – to learn it in our own hearts; to teach it to others and to enable it to remain alive for generations to come.

May God be with us on the journey. Amen.

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