

**Sermon Preached by The Reverend Jonathon W. Jensen, Rector
at Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
November 13, 2016**

Luke 21:5-19

When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified. By your endurance, you will gain your souls.

Over the last week, I have listened to and read about people who are profoundly sad and shocked. Some were in tears feeling unsafe or unsure about the future or wondering what could have been. I have also listened to those who believe they have finally been heard after feeling left out of the economy while still rejecting the bigotry. I have seen friendships strained, families divided, and a country grappling with its identity, direction, and values.

These are times that try the souls of women and men. The presidential election caught everyone off guard. It was an unexpected outcome leaving pundits and politicians and ordinary people struggling to understand how it happened and what the election might mean for our nation. Rather than attempt yet another political analysis, let me offer a way forward for how a follower of Jesus might live faithfully in these times.

Our Gospel reading says, “When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified.” The context of this story is the prediction of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was *the* symbol, the center, of *all* the people stood for and believed in. And soon it would lie in ruins before their eyes. Nations will turn against one another and on themselves. Even family members and friends will fight and betray one another. It was the end of what they knew and hoped for. It was a time filled with uncertainty and fear about what would happen next and how the people could live faithfully through it. Does that bear any resemblance to our situation today? Do not be terrified. By your endurance, you will gain your souls. That is, the struggle to seek and do what is right deepens character, identity, and faith. We *will* get through this and be stronger for it.

That word of hope is a recurring theme in the Scriptures. Almost every time in the Gospel an angel appears to a person, what are the first words the angel says? Do not be afraid! Fear not! The subtext is... do not be afraid because God is working through you. You have a calling and purpose and you are not alone. God and the other faithful will be with you to carry it out.

Throughout the exhausting process leading up to the election, we have been fed a diet of junk food and soundbites passing as news or policy. It is easy to grow, over time, to think that is the new normal or the only way it can be. Accusations, name calling, blaming, actions that do not inspire trust all in an atmosphere that cultivates division and bigotry are bad for everyone. Being immersed in all of this does not help us to live up to the values of our nation or our faith.

How might we bring some hope to ourselves and those we are called to serve? What can we do about it? Let me suggest four things. First, pray. A lot. Pray for our citizens, our president, our president elect, and our leaders to embody the best of who we can be as a people.

Second, there is a new symbol spreading across the country as a show of solidarity with those who face discrimination be it racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, or anything else. It's a common safety pin. Some have taken to wearing a safety pin to show those who are marginalized – you are safe with me... I will stand with you. It comes from England after the Brexit vote to stand against racism. To wear the safety pin on your shirt or jacket is a sign that you will not tolerate discrimination and are an ally of all who are marginalized.

Be mindful of treating anyone as the other, even those with whom you disagree. We are called to respect the dignity of *every* human being. Is the person who is marginalized created in the image of God or not? Is the person who voted differently than you created in the image of God or not? When you see anyone being treated as *the other, the outsider*, do not look the other way. I will be wearing a safety pin starting today.

Third, make your voice heard and your beliefs known. Volunteer in the church and organizations that embody the values you support. How do your time, money, and attention reflect your values and beliefs? Our Holiday Bazaar is a perfect example of volunteering to serve those in need in our community and beyond.

Finally, think of your purpose, of Calvary's calling and purpose, in this time as tending a metaphorical garden. What do you want to grow in your life, in our church, in our nation? What do we want to teach our children or the world about who we are? Seeds of hate, mistrust, and division have already been sown and are spreading. Plant the virtues you would like to see take deeper root in our country and church. Love, generosity, patience, understanding, and hope are what we need to grow and share. We need deliberately to cultivate welcome and acceptance of others and the wisdom and courage to know and do what is right.

Keep planting these virtues and attitudes. Tend that garden. Name and pull out the weeds where you can. Water and feed what is good. Let the sun shine on them. One of the best parts of a garden is the harvest. Plant, tend, reap, and share with those around us to nourish everyone in hope.

Calvary's mission has *not* changed. Our calling and purpose are not dependent on the president, whoever he or she may be. In this time in our country, Calvary needs to embrace and deepen our call even further. Our church, our nation need you.

Let your neighbor, let the world, know we stand against bigotry and stand with those who are pushed to the margins. We stand with all those who seek the *good* of all. We will not give in to hate. And we will not give up. Do not be afraid. Fear not. We have a purpose and calling to proclaim and embody what is good and what is just. And by so doing, we will gain our souls and the soul of our nation.