

November 13, 2016 Isaiah 65:17-25 Luke 21:5-19 "Challenge and Opportunity"

This week has been a rough one for about half of the people in our country. After a brutal year-plus of campaign ugliness, many of us were surprised by the results of the Presidential election. Some were elated; some were devastated. ALL of us face a lot of uncertainties as our nation looks to the future.

Children of undocumented parents are having nightmares, worried that their parents will be forced to leave the United States. Persons with chronic health problems are worried that they may lose their health insurance. There are lots of unknowns and challenges ahead.

Yesterday a woman called me, having trouble with her two daughters, one of whom is in high school, having a rough time with the thought of the incoming President, for to them the election seems to have said that women don't matter, manners don't matter, integrity doesn't matter, and bullies can win. My niece, who is gay, also contacted me with her concern about her future. These feelings are real and shared by many.

So here we are. Many of you have celebrated what happened Tuesday. I walked into our church Wednesday morning and heard someone saying, "I hope he really does lock her up," referring to Hillary Clinton. Hearing this felt to me like someone had punched me in the stomach. Why is there so much hatred? Can't we finally, now that the election is over, try to show love and have a work-together spirit?

Today's scriptures seem to pretty well fit with this past week, for the Isaiah passage promises people who have been defeated by the super-power-of-the-day Babylonia that God is yet at work in their lives, and that finally, God will restore them. And the Gospel reading speaks of rough times ahead, but also of God's unending purposes and power to finally bring about peace and life.

No matter how you are feeling about the world today, whether you're delighted that things will probably finally change a lot in our government or you're losing sleep over what may lie ahead, hear this: GOD is in charge, no matter who sits in the White House, no matter who gets elected to Congress, no matter what happens in this world. God will work things out, God will see us through, and all we need to do is keep our eyes and our hearts on God. The best way to do this is to look at Jesus, God's heart revealed in human form.

So what did Jesus say and do? "Love the Lord your God with all that you have and are; and love your neighbor as yourself." "Repay no one evil. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5) "And remember, I am with you forever, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28)

A rough road lies ahead of us all. It will have lots of tough challenges, whether they are elections or protests or family problems or hardships with the economy or wars. There's always a challenge, because every single day, you and I must decide whether to trust GOD or to let negativity and hatred become our way of life. Every hour we make these decisions, maybe every breath we take involves them. Certainly every word we speak declares who we are following.

Now for an illustration of a young man who decided that a fearful challenge was a great opportunity: “Years ago an organization in Montana offered a bounty of \$5,000 for every wolf captured alive. Two hunters names Sam and Jed decided to head for the hills and make some money capturing wolves. Day and night they scoured the mountains and forests, searching for their valuable prey. Exhausted after three days of hunting without any success, they both fell asleep.

“During the night, Sam suddenly woke up to find that he and Jed were surrounded by a pack of fifty wolves, with flaming red eyes and bared teeth, snarling at the two hunters and preparing to pounce. Sam nudged Jed and said, ‘Hey, wake up! We’re gonna be rich!’” (Told by Wayne Rice in *More Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks*, p. 176)

We face challenges, usually not quite like those wolves... Wars, earthquakes, elections, health crises, fear, famine, drug addiction, crime, bullies, our own failures, can all threaten us and threaten to undo us. But they need not, because God is with us; we are NOT on our own. But we *are* called to make what is important to God important to ourselves: feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, show mercy and live out your faith. (See Matthew 25)

Our challenge, as Americans, as Republicans or Democrats, if we are Christian, is to follow Jesus. “What would Jesus do?” ought to be the question guiding our hearts, words and actions today and throughout all the days ahead. What would Jesus do right now, and what would Jesus have us/me do?

May every challenge we face become an opportunity for each of us to trust and love God and love others; in Jesus’ name. By holding fast, we will gain our lives and, by the grace of God, our souls. (21:19 CEB) Thank God! Amen.