

This is our last reading from the gospel of Mark for a while, next Sunday is Christ the King Sunday with a reading from John, then with Advent we will start a new church year and we'll be focusing on the gospel of Luke.

Today, our reading is still right in the middle of Passion Week. The central drama is between Jesus and religious professionals. And Jesus talks about the destruction of the Temple. This is a big deal... The Hebrews believed that the Temple is where the presence of God resided, in the holy of holies... So, to talk about the destruction of the Temple is blasphemous.

And at the death of Jesus, in chapter 15, we hear that the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom... The curtain around the holy of holies... In other words, God was no longer contained, but out in the world. Change was coming...

Change is always a hard thing; I know it is for me-- if I could get away with it, I'd wear the same jeans and grey fleece every single day! I like routine, I like certainty, I like familiarity... And you know the saying, the only thing that doesn't change, is change itself. Change makes me nervous, fearful and anxious... I guess we all adapt to change a little differently.

Now, the God we worship, is a God of transformation, in other words a God who changes us. As we confess in the Apostles Creed; the Father creates, the Son redeems, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies. It's the language of a God who changes things... Sometimes we're on board with it, sometimes not...

Another name for our gospel reading today is the little apocalypse. And it goes on to talk about the desolating sacrilege, the coming of the Son of Man, family members betraying and killing family members, and the necessity for watchfulness.

Some scary stuff... And unfortunately, some Christian writers have exploited this apocalyptic material, claiming to know things that Jesus himself doesn't even know... In fact, Jesus warns us against these false prophets.

The gospel writers were perceptive to notice that the gospel leads right into apocalypse. The gospel is about change, and change is scary... It is the end of one way of being, and the

beginning of a new way of being... In a way, Christianity is always about endings and new beginnings; in fact, that's what sanctification is! And that process is often fraught with fear and divisiveness. Christian history is full of turmoil and violence. It certainly was during the reformation...

My intention this morning is to walk directly into the heart of this scary text and talk about hope. Because it is exactly resurrection hope that is the energy, the driver of change...

In a nut shell the gospel is a story about the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Many of Paul's writings emphasize the centrality of crucifixion. In first Corinthians Paul says "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

As Christians we love to focus on the incarnation and resurrection, which is pretty much Christmas and Easter... I know I love Christmas and Easter. That crucifixion stuff is hard and scary... It does take some courage to go through Passion Week...

As Lutherans, one of our gifts to the theological world is brutal honesty. We call something what it is. We don't pretend; we don't white-wash anything... We look at the world and tell people what we see. We tell the truth...

And one big truth we know about Human beings, is that we're in bondage to sin, we're Saints and Sinners at the same time... And sin is the root cause of all broken relationships.

How often have we accused others of wrong doing? How often have we talked about others behind their back? How often have we pointed our finger at someone? This is the same behavior that killed Jesus. This is the stuff of scapegoating. Perhaps you could say we crucify others all the time...

Now, we didn't participate in the death of Jesus. But frankly, if we had happened to be in that crowd that day, we probably would have been yelling "crucify him..."

This is the truth, and as Lutherans we tell the truth... So, the crucifixion creates a mirror for us to see Jesus blood on our own hands; in other words, it lets us see how we crucify others all the

time. And when we can see that, our eyes are opened and repentance happens. Change happens.

And please notice the direction of this change; Instead of crucifying others, we crucify ourselves in love for the neighbor. Instead of judging others, we judge ourselves. Instead of using violence, we work for peace. Instead of making victims, we work for justice...

And the direction of this change is scary for some... And it creates fear. It leads to anxiety and when our fear of each other is too intense, physical violence is not too far away.

And it cuts right through our families, later in Mark 13, Jesus says "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all because of my name."

Pretty heavy stuff... And all part and parcel because of the Gospel... Now let's get to the hope... Our reading says that this violence "is but the beginning of the birth pangs." So, what is being born?

Quick story... It was in April of 1968, the same year my grandpa Johnson died. I was aware of what death was... I remember waiting for my Dad to pick me up after school. He was late and I was probably scared. Eventually he arrived and I climbed into the front seat. He was quiet and seemed preoccupied. The radio was on...

The radio announcer kept repeating that a certain person had been shot and killed. I didn't know who it was, and so I remember callously saying, "Who cares; what's the big deal, people die every day." My dad looked at me with scorn and didn't say anything.

The next day in school I learned much about Dr Martin Luther King. And as a very young person, I remember being deeply moved by the stories. Dr Martin Luther King was a man of faith and love who was shot and killed by a man of fear and violence. And I came to feel ashamed about my insensitive comment...

In a very real way Dr Martin Luther King was crucified... And as I've gotten older that crucifixion story has changed my life. And exactly because so much is at stake, I've come to passionately believe in resurrection hope.

Like Dr Martin Luther King had a dream... I have resurrection Hope...

Hope and despair are very real forces that shape our future and our world. What kind of future do you want to live into? Do you hope to live into a future characterized by love and peace, or do you fear a future characterized by violence? With all the mass shootings, and political divide, it feels to me that our country is sliding into cynicism and despair.

This past week I read a sports article about the Timberwolves trading Jimmy Butler. The writer was amazingly cynical. He pretty much thought that if Philadelphia was hoping to win any title, they were going to be sorely disappointed. And then he said, "Hope is the liquor of fools." Hope is the liquor of fools... Boy that phrase caught my attention...

I thought to myself, if hope is the liquor of fools, then I'm the biggest fool of all.

My friends, Hope matters! It is not a luxury, it is not foolish, it is not irrelevant, it is not trendy... Hope is given to us by God; hope is the struggle to secure God's Kingdom in this world as it is in heaven.

This stuff we're talking about makes a real difference in this very real world. We are not people who believe hope is the liquor of fools, we are people of resurrection, we insist the world God created is good and all things will be redeemed.

This is a living and breathing hope that changes everything about how we live here and now, and toward the future. And this is not some magic wand; this is real, this is how this very real-world works... Our resurrection hope is for the sake of the world.

And we share the same hope as Isaiah, and Jesus and Dr Martin Luther King.

In Isaiah's words:

God shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

This is the good news. This is the future that we pray for. This is our hope; this is what is being born in and through us.

This is new creation. Fear will be transformed into faith... We will no longer crucify each other... We will take our tools of violence and turn them into tools of sustenance... Change isn't easy... It's fraught with all kinds of birthing pain.

When we learn to live like Jesus toward one another... that will truly be a second coming. The Jesus we watch for bears love, peace, mercy and justice for all people. And let's always remember, big things happen little by little, and they are miracles...

And despite all the destruction and death that the devil can throw at us, the Kingdom of God comes. Believe me, the kingdom comes. And for God, nothing is impossible.

Amen.