

## Pastor Roy's sermon from November 13, 2016

The challenges of Jesus' day are no different than the challenges we face today. Of course, we have more convenience, more comfort, greater ease and many more medical options than the people of Jesus' day could have ever dreamed of. But the dark side of these is distraction--distraction from God's gifts, we have unrealistic expectations, and we forget to live in the present moment.

So, yes, in the first century there was more hardship but we likely have more stress—worrying about all the details of our complicated lives. We, like they, have fears. . .and we place our hope in the wrong things. We create false gods and need apocalyptic reminders.

Where is God? How do we distinguish between the true and the false? How do we make sure we are building our lives on solid ground? How and where do we find God today?

The apocalyptic stark reality reminds us to think long and hard about our priorities and to resist folly—to resist idolatry. To place our trust in what is truly important and true—God, and God's mercy.

The false is revealed when we hit walls and are pressed to our own limits of hope and mercy. Is despair our teacher for what matters—for what is important? Do our many mistakes teach us to let go of the false and rest in the grace of God? Failure is the sure teacher for finding God. Think about our hardships, pain, suffering, and failure.

Do we not try to find God by succeeding, by overcoming, by conquering. We even want to deny our part in causing suffering and evil and pain. So we create a false God and a false salvation where we are in charge and all we do is good—all of our causes are good. And if I am in charge, if I am comfortable, if I have arrived, ***I have not yet found God***, my comfort is false, and I am lost in my own false thoughts and imaginations.

But, but the distractions, betrayals, wars, insurrections, nations rising against nation, earthquakes, storms, famines, plagues, or in 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy—the election results and the aftermath—these are not the end, these are not what we should fear nor are they the things in which we should place our confidence. [pause]

Jesus says, “But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.” He doesn't follow these with if. . .or when. He just says, they will not. . .and you will.

Some folks make the spiritual life, the life of faith out to be complicated and a mysterious path full of decisions and actions which require secret knowledge and expertise. Jesus strongly disagrees. “Don't worry about what you will say in defense of your life or faith. Don't Worry!” Simply endure. You will be ***fine***. Let go of fear and anxiety. And when you don't, you are fine. And when you fail, Endure! Return to the struggle and trust. Because you are in the care of a God who loves you and holds you in the web of life and mercy.

We all want the short cuts to peace, we hope for the easy way, but time after time, it is not the easy but the painful, the difficult, the despairing way that leads us into peace, truth, and love. Perhaps ***this*** is that of which Jesus speaks when he says, “But not a hair of your head will parish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.” Endurance with assurance that comes from the divine.

The epistle reminds us, “Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.” And the prophet promises, “for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.

Don't worry when you are overwhelmed by trouble. Worry when you are comfortable, when your plans work out, when you are wildly successful and no longer forced to trust in the impossible odds of grace.

Whether we are talking about politics or about how long our individual churches will last and whether we have been faithful enough, all of this is ***not*** about successfully supporting our political and spiritual egos, ***all of this*** is about the painful journey into faith, into trust, into hope—not in ourselves, but in the One who challenges us in our attempts to understand, and predict, and control. Jesus is talking about raw faith. And this faith proclaimed by Jesus is the only faith that will last. The only way to healing, the only way to find our souls. The only way to peace.

This faith comes not by success but by listening to our failure, learning from our own agony and weariness as it takes us by the hand into the gracious Presence.

So let us struggle on. Let us pray for our neighbors, those we trust and those of whom we are afraid. Do good for them as well. For therein we will find mercy and peace. There are no shortcuts. It hurts all the way. This is the way of the cross. Not the way of *our* judgment, but the judgment of unimaginable grace, not to those who deserve it, but to those who definitely don't deserve it. There is our hope. Thanks be to God.

Luther was surprised by the Roman church's reaction to his invitation to reform. He did not want to cause a revolution, He loved the church. Is that our approach to the whole church of Christ today?

Children's—Do you ever have questions? Do you ever wonder how?