

Pastor Roy's sermon from November 18, 2018

How often and with how much energy do we concentrate on things that are just beyond us? Our phones, cars, houses, cures for diseases, powerful people on our side or against us, entertainment, and all the forms of media. Not that these things are terrible, but there are so many distractions from what and who is right in front of us. Sometimes we are distracted from what is within us, a need for emotional healing or friendship, or prayer which brings us fully into the presence of God, creation, and all of God's gifts for us.

Sometimes we seek distractions from things that amaze or interest us for the moment. The latest news story or event.

It feels like the kingdom is often beyond us. And for what are we hoping? For whom are we waiting?

Jesus warns his disciples, "Don't be led astray! Don't assume because someone speaks for me that they have anything to do with me at all!"

How do we know the difference between a distraction and the wisdom of Christ, the wisdom of God?

Jesus speaks of a great upheaval a time of great trouble, terror, and suffering. Since the time of Jesus, there has been so much suffering and trouble, sometimes entire societies ripped apart violently, it's hard for me to imagine what Jesus is talking about. And that's hard for a preacher to admit.

Of course, I can't leave it there. Some have interpreted these passages as referring to a specific, future time of suffering which surpasses all other times of suffering. But it's tough to really measure that. When someone dies a very, very difficult death, what could be more painful than that? When millions of Jews and Slavic peoples, and disabled people are slaughtered during WWII, what could be worse? When genocide happens more and more throughout our world that we turn away from it and no longer want to hear about it in the news, when there are more and more refugees caused by civil wars, we are tempted to simply be glad it is not our own country embroiled in civil war, though the way we speak about our political enemies is clearly the first step toward that end.

Even so, it feels to me that Jesus and the other prophets are getting our attention. This beginning of birth pains, are not pain and suffering and grief and illness the very things that bring us back to our faith? Faith in love, salvation, and

resurrection to a new creation of hope and peace? Don't those dreaded shadows in our lives end up being the very thing that calls us back to God's Grace?

Until we despair of making it by our own strength, we never learn to trust in God's Grace which is freely, lovingly, mercifully provided to all who allow themselves to fall into it? We cannot gently lower ourselves into it. We cannot devise our own plan of survival to overcome all of our troubles.

We struggle, spare no effort to save ourselves by believing the right things, eating the right things, avoiding the wrong things, loving the right people, preparing for the future, making the right decisions, you fill in the blank.

I hear Jesus and Daniel, Ezekiel, John on the isle of Patmos writing Revelation saying, "Try all you want, but this is just the beginning of the great trouble that will cause you to finally let go. . .and fall into the grace of God—no strategies, no strings attached, no secret knowledge, just faith in **God's** love and mercy.

God, teach us to let go of all of our distractions to save ourselves and finally trust You and your lasting care. Amen.