

“Living in the Power of Christ’s Resurrection”

Proper 27B

Mark 12:38-44

Psalm 146

The Sunday following the Presidential Election

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When I realized that I would be preaching the Sunday after the election, I just groaned. Given all that is going on in our country, it seemed that no matter what I preached upon, it would become background noise to the turmoil of the election. That, in and of itself is cause for sadness as the Good News of Jesus Christ shouldn’t be shoved into a backstage closet. In all that we do, Christ is our center. His message of love for all people should be the thing that motivates our words and actions. It is his love that comforts us when we grieve. Christ is there in our joys and our sorrows.

The past eight plus years have revealed some of the worst of human nature. Many are shocked at the sheer number of mongers of hate. Sure, we knew they existed, but in our arrogance, we thought they were a dying breed. But those who experience discrimination and exclusion on a regular basis know that the rest of the world was just fooling themselves. Malevolence finally feels safe stepping from the shadows and into the mainstream.

To pretend otherwise is to ignore our own Baptismal Covenant and Christ’s call to us to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect and protect the dignity of every human being. We can’t just click the heels of ruby slippers, close our eyes, and repeat the mantra “there’s no place like home.” Nor can we blithely believe that our world will somehow magically transform into the “pink and rosy before times” where we were blissfully ignorant. We shouldn’t stick our heads in the sand and pretend that everything is fine.

We must remember that the only thing that can transform our world, the only thing that can stand up to malevolence is the enduring, unconditional love and light of Jesus Christ. We carry his light and love into the world, pushing back the darkness. Pushing back against hate. Changing hearts and changing lives, one step and one person at a time. The task before us seems daunting.

I am reminded of one of the countless adaptations of The Star Thrower story by Loren Eiseley. A man was walking along the seashore after a terrible storm had washed countless starfish onto the beach leaving them stranded. As he walked along, he came across a boy throwing starfish back into the sea so that they might live. The man told the boy that his task was fruitless as there were

too many starfish to make a difference. As the boy threw another starfish back into the ocean, he replied, "It made a difference to that one."

It is a matter of how you look at the world and your life. Do you see scarcity or abundance? Obstacles or opportunities? That boy on the beach saw opportunities. He saw the possibility of life rather than the surety of death, and he stepped in to give life to the best of his ability.

He wasn't like Martin Luther King Jr. or Mother Teresa who changed the world on a grand scale, but he didn't have to be, because he still managed to make a difference one starfish at a time. Every conversation, every encounter no matter how brief is an opportunity to share the light and love of Christ. To share hope. To be a lifeline, making a difference one person at a time.

When Jesus sat in the temple, he saw a widow neglected by the majority of the temple leaders. She was forgotten, perhaps even looked down upon by everyone but Jesus. Even the disciples dismissed her in their admiration of the grandeur and splendor of the temple, completely ignoring the fact that the temple leaders had failed this woman. The temple was supposed to care for and protect her. But instead, it left her vulnerable.

When I was in Ireland, I visited Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin. After entering the courtyard gates, I noticed a person sleeping on a bench in the courtyard. Their face was hidden by a dark blanket that wrapped around their body leaving their bare feet exposed to the elements. I remember my immediate sadness that this person was sleeping outside in the cold instead of being invited into the church to find shelter and warmth within its walls. As I got closer, I realized I wasn't seeing a real person but a sculpture. And then I saw a piece of wood that someone had driven into a hole in the feet. It was a sculpture of Jesus, homeless without any place to rest his head but a bench in the courtyard of the church.

It is a reminder that the work of the Church and Christ's followers begins by seeing and acknowledging the plight of the homeless, the poverty that pervades our world, and all those whose dignity is threatened or who seek justice. We must see those whom the 'powers that be' tell us are beneath notice or who are treated as being less than human. The work of the church is to care for and protect the vulnerable. We cannot succumb to what a Roman poet called *panem et circenses* (*panem et kir-ken-sees*), in English 'bread and circuses' which are used to distract us from the oppression and horrors of our society and politics. Jesus tells us, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." This is the battle we face- to call out corruption and the exploitation of others for personal gain; to fight for the dignity of all God's children as we strive for justice and peace.

A church's vitality isn't measured by the money it spends but by its people and how they serve each other and the surrounding community in the name of Christ. The malevolence that walks our streets and tries to push its way into every aspect of our lives can only be pushed back into the shadows from which it came by the light and love of Christ that we carry in our hearts and out into the world. As people of faith believing in the redemptive love of Jesus Christ, we are called to protect the vulnerable, and to be agents of reconciliation and peace.

While destructive forces try to divide us, we must pray and work for unity. When hate spews forth from the mouths of both the high and the lowly, we must counter with words and acts of love. Looking upon the world around us in all its human failings and frailty, we are called to see life rather than the surety of death. To trust, that with God's help, we will make a difference in at least one person's life as we live in the power of Christ's resurrection.

Amen.