

Now What?
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First Congregational United Church of Christ
Luke 21:5-19
November 13, 2016

In last Sunday's sermon entitled, *November 9th*, Melanie offered these words of insight, "When we wake on Wednesday morning it will be to a world in which there is no illusion about the divisions and vastly divergent perceptions of our nation. Some of us, because of our families or workplaces or school communities, have long felt the burrowed—deep divisions in our national community. For some, the disparities of resources, access to power, the contrasting goodness and harshness of American life, our relationships with those who are different, have long felt disjointed and untethered. This election cycle and the turmoil of our nation happening alongside it have simply laid bare for all to see what has been there all along.

For others of us, there is a sense of the veil being pulled away and there are more questions than answers.

The deep pain, the anxiety and wild fears that have been laid open in this past year have held up one gigantic national mirror and some, though not all, of us are shocked to see what is staring back. And yet, no matter how we come to where we are now, we all share the question: 'what now?'"

I would like to say, *what a difference a week makes!*

Instead, the question is as compelling as ever... what does love require of us now?

As we faithfully consider this question on this Consecration Sunday, let us come together as a community of faith, holding one another in prayer, surrounded by the compassionate presence of our God, and with faces lifted to catch a glimpse of the revealing light we will need to make our way boldly forward.

Let us pray...Creator God: Give us strength to live another day; let us not turn away before its difficulties or prove recreant to its duties; let us not lose faith in other people; keep us sweet and sound of heart, in spite of ingratitude, treachery, or meanness. Preserve us from minding little stings or giving them; help us to keep our hearts clean, and to live so honestly and fearlessly that no outward failure can dishearten us or take away the joy of conscious integrity. Open wide the eyes of our souls that we may see good in all things; grant us this day new vision of your promise. Inspire us with the spirit of joy and gladness; and make us cups of compassion to suffering souls; in the name of our gentle companion, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON

I live these days with a disquieted heart. I know I am not alone. How will we heal after such an election? There is so much that felt wrong about what we just went through... regardless of who we voted for! We now know we live in a nation divided on key issues, and there is so much that has happened that has deeply troubled us. What are we to do faced with so great a challenge?

As Melanie offered, "When the world shifts and shakes, unmoored by divisions of race, gender, scarcity and wealth, opportunity and exclusion, when truth is devalued and greed and disrespect is celebrated, we still stand on the bedrock of our ancient teachings."

This week, I found solace in the words of the companion Lectionary Text for this morning, Isaiah 65, where the prophet proclaims: “God is about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

In this time, the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust!”

What a wonderful world Isaiah foretells. A time of peace and tranquility. A place without oppression and pain. A place and a people blessed by God. Surely, this is the kin-dom of God. This is the world that we are promised that we must work toward as Christians. A place of hope, peace, love, and justice.

It is coming says Isaiah.

But when? That is the question the disciples ask Jesus in our Gospel account.

When will it come Jesus? Do these hard times contain signs that God is ready to make things new again? Should we just prepare for this new age?

Jesus answers by saying, all these so-called signs of the coming new age are offering false hope. You need to trust me on this! Instead, see these things that are happening as an opportunity to *testify about your faith. Live out the promise of the Gospels. Make real the love of God for all people. Bear witness to your faith in all things during these times between times.*

And then he gave this warning: “Be prepared.... Your very witness will be a threat to the established powers of this earth. The way will not be easy! But know also this... I will be with you and guide you and preserve you. You may not know what to say or do... that is ok... move forward anyway... trust in God.” Or put another way, seek what Love require of us now!

Here are a couple of suggestions:

Bear Witness-As you know, we are part of a progressive Christian community. What does that mean? Among other things it means...we seek to live in community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to:

- Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics,
- Believers and agnostics,
- Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities,
- Those of all classes and abilities

This inclusivity, this radical embrace is something we hold dear. We believe that following the path and teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life; we also affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey as God’s one people. This faith understanding makes us a bit unique in the Christian family and points to a way of living out the call to do what Love requires of us.

As you know, this past Wednesday, the day after the election, (timing that was intentional by the way) we had our second of three Islamic—Christian Dialogue in our Sacred Conversation Sessions. As I stood in the

back of the Wheeler Room filled with people it was a beautiful thing to behold. After our time together, having learned from one another about our respective faith traditions we all experienced a poignant end to our evening when Haytham Abodale, recited prayers through song that he usually offers at the Islamic Center on Friday night. It was deeply moving... and then he spoke with true sincerity of his appreciation for us and his gratitude for the evening. Not only did he feel safe, but he felt welcomed and embraced. Suddenly we were no longer in the Wheeler Room. We were standing on Holy Ground.

Friends, this is what we are called to do. This is one of the ways we can live out what love requires of us. You see, these Sacred Conversation with our new friends at the Islamic Center signal the start of a new and deeper relationship. For it is my hope, that we will not only learn more about one another and our respective faith traditions... but also build a foundation of a true friendship where the love of God is shared.

This is but one of the ways we might bear witness to God's unfathomable love. For we have been called to bring God's kin-dom here on earth.

To do so, we must:

- Bear witness to our faith and stand with our school children who must endure the daily realities of bullying or chants of Build the Wall from their peers.
- Bear witness to the fear of our young people who watch our environment clearly show signs of strains by our misuse and lack of courage to face difficult challenges to fix it.
- Bear witness to our faith that lifts up all people and demands an end to the misogynist ways of our culture that has held women and girls down for too long!
- Bear witness to our faith that says we are all one people, regardless of skin color or country of origin.
- Bear witness and...Rise Up!

Cameron Trimble, Exec Director of the Center for Progressive Renewal, wrote an email to clergy on Wednesday. In it she wrote, "So, progressive people of faith, here is the deal: Grieve quickly. Hold on to one another today. Cry. Feel all of the fear that is rumbling around in you. And then...Rise up. You are stronger and braver than you know. Now we will prove that to each other.

Rise up.

You were made for such a time as this. You know that love wins. Kindness, compassion, civility and equality are the values that Jesus taught us and the ones to which we turn today.

Rise up.

For the sake of the people we are, the people we love and the planet we live within, you must prepare yourself for leadership.

Rise up, sweet people...Our progressive Christian movement is now officially born."

Now, dear ones of First Congregational Church of Eugene, as we strive to follow God's light, let us rise up, bearing witness to our faith and work for God's kin-dom here on earth!

Be the open hands of God!

Be the compassionate heart of God!

Be the Church!

Luke 21:5-19

⁵When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” ⁷They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” ⁸And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them. ⁹“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” ¹⁰Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. ¹²“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; ¹⁵for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your souls.