

Pentecost, Proper 28 November 18, 2018 - The Sunday before Thanksgiving. St. Augustine's in-the-Woods Episcopal Church, Freeland WA. Nigel Taber-Hamilton Mark 13:1-8

If you've listened to anything I've said over the years in my sermons you'll recognize one constant: the future is coming, and it'll be different than the present.

So today – based on what's in the gospel passage, I want to say “forget everything I said!.....at least for today!”

Jesus says that to the disciples – don't focus on the seeming longevity of the Temple – temples not built on justice won't last, and this one (as the story of the widow's mite, which immediately precedes this passage reminds us) is no exception. In his words I hear echoes of the Ascension story - when suddenly, as the disciples stand on Bethany hill transfixed by Jesus' departure, a voice (Jesus' voice?!) comes from above, and says, in essence, “don't just stand there! DO SOMETHING!”

Do something, but not out of fear – ‘cos it's easy (Jesus said) to be fearful. There's a lot of bad stuff happening out there – empires (well, one empire: Rome) are always all about absolute power – “my way or the highway” – with often gruesome ends waiting for those who challenged them.

On this day, that reality is just as real as it was in Jesus' time.

That reality – our reality – calls for us to be cautious, thoughtful, and intentional, and to do so in the “now” – don't be naive, don't bury your heads in the sand, but also don't spend your energy worrying about the future, or fussing about when your future will end: it'll just paralyze you.

Let go of the things over which you have no control – which is a lot – and focus on the things over which you can have some influence.

“The things that you can influence” are mostly things that can't be done alone. If it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a village to help create the sort of world we want our children to live in; and, notice, it's a village that does that, not individuals, but also not large numbers of people, not a “town's-worth” or a “city's-worth” of people, but a village. As Margaret Mead said *“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”*

We are a small group of thoughtful, committed people; we are a “village” - what's next, then? The voice in the sky at Jesus' Ascension (Jesus' voice?) didn't say what was next for the disciples, what they should be doing, just that they should be doing something! I'm not going to tell you what to do, except to say that it should be something, not nothing!

Okay, I lied! I AM going to tell you to do something! Give thanks! Yes, I know – Thanksgiving is on Thursday, so that's a traditional thing to say. But our faith says that we should give thanks all the time. Paul – after talking in 1 Thessalonians (5) about the darkness of the times, said this:

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances” (vs 16-17) That’s a pretty good recipe for a happy life! Rejoice, pray, give thanks! We should be doing that every day, not just one day – or a few days – each year. And as a reminder, we do that every Sunday: “Eucharist” means “We give thanks”; the prayer said over the bread and wine is called “The Great Thanksgiving Prayer” – so carry that over into the rest of your days, each week! *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.”*

But – of course! – that’s especially true this Thursday. Do that, but remember. Remember that our mythical first Thanksgiving didn’t exactly go down the way it’s portrayed: in the fall of 1621 the starving colonists were saved by the Wam-pan-o-ag locals’ willingness to share in the bounty that they – the Wampanoag – had raised and harvested. The thanks at that meal from us white invaders must have been rich and real and relieved. We’ve remembered it more for the food itself than for those who provided it, and those providers have suffered mightily as a consequence of our selective memory.

So this Thanksgiving, I encourage you not to have a selective memory! Spend the rest of this week remembering who and what you have to be thankful for, and find a way to “pay it forward”, not just for one day, but every day. Take what Paul says to the Romans to heart (in Chapter 12):

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” (Romans 12:9-18)

A blessed Thanksgiving to you all.