

Grace, mercy and peace, to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the God who offers hope in the midst of tribulation and is ever faithful. Amen

Do you ever have days when it feels like today's texts are being lived out in the midst of our lives here and now? Florida braced for Hurricane Nicole and then watched huge pieces of the beach wash away into the ocean along with homes and businesses. Total destruction has been rained down on Ukraine in so many places and still continues. Polar bears balance precariously on small ice floats as the polar caps are shrinking, the Rain forests are disappearing, bird migrations have moved. We could all make lengthy lists, I am sure. Today is the 2nd to last Sunday of the church year. We are already thinking about Advent and Christmas preparations; looking beyond the multiple eschatological readings we hear today that speak of destruction and end times. Except for our Psalm all the texts speak of an end to times as the people of the day knew it. They also speak to us of the coming of different times and of God's faithfulness to God's people.

Luke's gospel was written a good 10 years after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem which occurred in 70AD. The beginning verses are both a forecast of what is to come and of what has already occurred. As his followers admire the beauty of the temple architecture, a vivid example of Herod's wealth and glory, around 33AD, Jesus tells them in so many words, someday this will all be gone, destroyed. Those reading Luke's gospel in 80AD and beyond know that indeed the temple was destroyed. The followers ask - When? How will we know? Did you notice that Jesus didn't tell them exactly when or even what signs will be the definite end times. He spoke of destruction, floods, earthquakes, wars, famines, plaques – another word for pandemic by the way, persecution and betrayal. And then tells them to endure to save their souls. Jesus tells them that all these kinds of things will happen but the end won't follow immediately, the end times are not imminent – there is no day one can circle on a calendar as 'The Day.' There will be an in-between time, a liminal time.

Shortly after Norm died, I picked up a book a friend had given me, that I had mostly just set aside. I did so because I felt like someone pulled the carpet out from under me – nothing was the same. Suddenly I had no clue who I was or what my life was about. The introduction in the book, *To Bless the Space*

Between Us by John O'Donohue, talks about liminal spaces 'thresholds' and 'tenuous territory of change.' O'Donohue considers these thresholds to be the rhythms of our human journey – times of new beginnings, closures, homecomings, callings, states of the heart, and times beyond endings for which he writes blessings. Pr. Jeff Kast in the podcast, *It's Been a Minute with Sam Sanders*, defines liminal space as 'times in our life when we feel like the past is where we're no longer living, and the new future has not really settled yet.' These could be times when we feel like we are in-between, in uncharted waters and unsure of where or what we are supposed to be doing; maybe even feeling as though we are drifting without leadership. They bring feelings of uncertainty, fear, self-doubt, even lack of energy. O'Donohue defines a blessing as '*a gracious invocation where the human heart pleads with the divine heart.*' Isn't this what we should do in uncertain times – go to God, the divine and seek help?

Zion and Trinity – find ourselves in the in-between times. Often in life when we are in-between it may feel easier to just wait until...things get better; to not worry about taking action; or to just enjoy life until things get back on track. The things of the world more easily pull us away from church or from our faith. There have been a few times in my life when I couldn't find a job and sometimes in that in-between space I would just think, 'well, I won't worry about keeping up with the bills, we can catch up when a job comes along.' Invariably things would begin to fall apart even more. We can find in these times that we either worry too much or we don't worry enough.

In my preparation for today's text I came across a website called, *Holy Textures*. The author offered some 'general principles' from Luke's gospel that resonated with me and I hope will for you as well.

- Everything in this world will pass away – nothing lasts forever;
- There will be false teachers, don't be led astray;
- There will be calamities, don't be afraid;
- Following Jesus will put you at odds with the people that run this world, and even your family. Don't be surprised or run away from conflict;
- There will come a time when you will have to account for why you are a follower of Christ, don't worry ahead of time. Jesus will be with you and give you all the wisdom you need at the time;

- Believe in Jesus, you won't perish. By enduring, you will save your true self.

Followers asked – what will the signs be? Jesus' response – “By your endurance you will gain your souls.” Similar to Paul's words to the Thessalonians, “Don't grow weary in doing what is right.”

How do we keep on keeping on in in-between times – in times of war, destruction, racial injustice, prejudice, cruelty, greed? How can we? Wouldn't it be better if God just came and ended all this mess of a world and began anew? I suspect that is what some of the people listening to Jesus were thinking or hoping for. But Jesus says, 'endure.'

How – by trusting God's faithfulness, justice, and righteousness. How? By using the tools Jesus has given us – by following His example of faithful living. In the first 4 verses of Chapter 21, Jesus looks up to see the rich people putting their gifts in the treasury and also sees a poor widow put in two small coins. His response in verses 3 and 4, “*Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.*” Have you ever considered that this widow had two coins – she could have chosen to only put in one coin but she didn't. She gave it all – she trusted and endured.

Kristen Leslie, in a course for seminarians called, “Pastoral Care for the In-Between Times,” says that the in-between times are times for growth. That it is in these times that the Holy Spirit is active and we can find ourselves more deeply connected to God and to one another in faith. Paul tells the Thessalonians to ‘*do their work quietly*’ and to ‘*not be weary of doing what is right.*’ I don't think Paul means that as Jesus' followers we have to be literally quiet when we are doing our church work, as in not talking or singing or laughing. I think rather that this is his way of saying we are to do our tasks for God and not boast about them. What does he mean by not getting weary of doing what is right? In my many years of being in church communities I have heard many times things like, I wish someone else was willing to... fill in the blank – sit on council, teach Sunday School, sing in the choir, open the church, read or serve as a worship assistant. I'm tired of doing it or the same people are always doing everything.

We do grow weary. But Jesus says we need to keep on keeping on, to endure. How? By praying, by gathering as we are today in community with other faithful believers; by opening our eyes to the pain of the world and seeking ways that we can help in some way; by not losing hope; by giving all our struggles over to the Lord. In one of my devotions this week were some helpful words from Psalm 20 as translated by Christine Robinson, *“To set yourself to these ordinary tasks is to take up the holy work of your life. Trust it – money and possessions and glory; these things come and go and they will never make us feel secure. Serenity is the goal. It comes from living deeply in the gift of life doing the work of love, cultivating our gratitude, and noting the touch of the Spirit in our lives.”*

And when we feel as though we can't take one more step, remember Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28, *“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* Jesus is always with us, always ready to help us on the journey, to navigate the tribulations of this world that we may remain faithful and rejoice in the heavenly kingdom when the day comes. We can have confidence because God has been faithful, Christ has died for our sins and for our salvation. His resurrection gives us eternal hope. And because of that we can rejoice and give thanks and *Sing songs of praise and thanks!* with the Psalmist for we know that our *God will judge the world with righteousness, and the people with equity.*

Amen.