

Sunday November 16, 2025
Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 28

Sermon: “God is here, there, and everywhere.”

When I started reading today’s gospel lesson, I was reminded of something I learned many years ago. The stones of the temple were the size of railway boxcars and weighed several tons each. God alone knows how the builders moved them from the quarry site up the mountain to the construction site. I can’t imagine listening to Jesus two millennia ago as he stated that “the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” I’m sure it sounded like an impossible claim. Even now, with our technology and machinery it would not be easy to dislodge such large pieces of stone. And my question now is, is Jesus talking just about the temple, or about the empire of his day, or about every empire in all of human history?

And then I read further. It truly sounded like the world we live in now. “Beware that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ ... Do not go after them.” This could just as well be a warning about far-right political leaders who promise that they can make our country great again, whether they be Hungarian, French, Argentinian, British, American, Brazilian, Dutch, Australian, German, Venezuelan, or yes, even Canadian. They claim they are the only ones who can restore greatness and prosperity for the nation and its citizens. Many ‘go after’ them, listen to them, believe them, and vote some of them into power. They have been ‘led astray’ by misinformation and disinformation.

When “you hear of wars,” like the wars in Syria, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine, Yemen, Myanmar, Sudan and South Sudan, Israel and Palestine, and others, or you hear “of insurrections,” like January 6, 2021 in our neighbour to the south, “do not be terrified.” There is so much divisiveness and conflict and violence in our world it is difficult not to be terrified. Even in Canada people are afraid of the rising levels of gun violence in major centres like the GTA and the Greater Vancouver Area, just to name two. Even in London,

people, especially women, are wary of walking alone in the downtown core during daylight hours because they are concerned about their own safety due to the numbers of the mentally unwell and the addicts who are everywhere.

And then we read this promise, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.” I’m not sure if this is a reference to military attack, or economic attack with countries using tariffs as economic weapons. “There will be earthquakes and plagues and famines.” Plagues, especially as people buy into conspiracy theories about vaccines and stop getting vaccinated against highly contagious diseases like measles, or as countries defund science and research into infectious diseases. One of the contributing factors into why our flu vaccines may not be a good match this year is because defunding and firings within the National Institutes of Health and policy changes within the administration caused the NIH to pull out of global task forces that work on such things. And famines, Gaza, a man-made famine. One initiated by the government of Benjamin Netanyahu and their attack on all Palestinians. There are other famines, Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, Haiti, Yemen, Myanmar, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Afghanistan, and even growing food insecurity within the US as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP, has been suspended by the funding crisis, and growing food insecurity in this country as food and housing prices rise faster than incomes. There will be an increasing number of extreme weather events, like the typhoons ravaging Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other Pacific nations, hurricanes in the Caribbean and along the east coast of North America, tornadoes across North America and elsewhere, flooding – pick a continent, droughts – again, pick a continent.

As if this is not enough, “there will be portents and great signs from the heavens.” O great! Just when we thought it couldn’t possibly get worse.

“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you... because of my name,” as government officers are doing with those who are peacefully protesting against ICE raids and detentions, government overreach, abuse of

power, and the like. Clergy have been pepper sprayed and shot with non-lethal weapons that have left them with bruises and broken bones, they have even been grabbed by the throat and choked, all because they stand and pray in public in front of detention centres. And don't think it couldn't happen here in Canada. The racism and hatred that lies simmering just below the surface here showed itself briefly in Ottawa a few years back.

This is the penultimate Sunday, the second to last Sunday, of the liturgical year. And, as the year draws to an end, things are looking pretty dim. There is a homelessness crisis, a mental health crisis, and an addiction crisis on top of the environmental crisis and economic crisis in this country. We are faced with absurd tariffs that are devastating parts of our economy and throwing thousands into unemployment and uncertainty. Prices are rising faster than wages, like the hike to electricity rates announced this past week. Organized religion is collapsing, and society's morals with it. And it's like we can't even help ourselves because there are too many interconnected crises that are so big that we don't even know where to start. Boy, could we use a saviour right about now.

That is coming, but first, Advent. Advent – the season of waiting, reflection, preparation and prayer. But God, you don't understand. Things are dire now. We need you now. We can't wait.

And before we get to Advent, we first have the feast of Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday next week. Christ the King / Reign of Christ started in the early twentieth century as a message of resistance against the rise of fascism in Europe. Franco, Mussolini, Hitler, Milei, Putin, Min Aung Hlaing, Lukashenko, Putin, Orban, Trump, or any other person are not the supreme ruler – Christ is the supreme ruler, and it is Christ's presence we are most in need of in our world right now. O come, O come, Emmanuel.

To which God says, "By your endurance you will gain your souls." In other words, in your waiting 'keep the faith.' Love your enemy and pray for those who

persecute you, feed the hungry, attend to the ill, clothe the naked and house the homeless, give drink to the thirsty, visit the prisoner, and pray some more.

God knows what a mess we have made of God's creation. God sees our pain and fear and mistrust and hatred and ... The question is not about what we are feeling, but about how we respond. Do we lash out in fear, or do we stand firm in our faith? Even though it may feel like God has abandoned us to our own foolishness, God is with us, even as God was with Jesus when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" as he hung on the cross.

Over the millennia empires have risen and fallen. We are at a point when it appears one empire is on its deathbed and another is waiting in the wings to replace it. And there has been one constant in all of it. God is there, God is here, with the faithful and the doubting alike. O come, O come, Emmanuel, for we need you now as ever before.