



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 8, 2017

Are These the End Times?

Matthew 21:33-46

A moment of silence for prayer...for focus...and the trust that the Holy Spirit will speak to each of us.....

Over the past weeks, with the end of summer, while the chill of the night returns, when our family, work, and schedules ratchet up expectation. There is the sense that we just don't have enough time to do the things we choose, the things that we don't seem to find time for when choices abound, choices made that seem to leave so many things undone, I have sensed a pace which seemed to be defined by one word "urgency."

And with the days seeming so short, you have/I have longed with a growing nostalgia for those "lazy and hazy" days of summer now past. The words of a friend, "It is good to have the rain, but _____." You can fill in where I have not yet found the right words. And I have sometimes felt that "urgency" breeds anxiety which leads to the countdown to Summer 2018.

"Are these the end times?" A question I have heard off and on in conversation. In His words about what that time would be like, Jesus said, "Many will come in my name...leading many astray... wars and rumors of war, nations against nation, kingdom against kingdom, famine, earthquakes, many will fall away, betrayals, wickedness...love will grow cold." Our question may have been the question the disciples were asking and our world seems that way with Hurricane Nate having made landfall and Las Vegas still stings the heart and the other question we often ask, "Why?"

For the 12 there were signs galore. Times had been tough for them: the religious leaders were watching and challenging with trick questions, He taught and healed and His hometown would not receive him twice, John the Baptist had been beheaded, and He began to speak of His death, resurrection and second coming. Each time adding to the picture of suffering.

Entering Jerusalem for the last time the odds of "end-time talk" must have continued and increased among His own. Jesus pressed truth as He taught the parables we have heard and shared these past three week. Each one teaching the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven ---

- ✠ the truth about TOTAL FORGIVENESS, the story about a king who forgave a servant's total debt though the servant did not forgive those who owed him;
- ✠ the truth about REDEMPTION FOR ALL, the story about the householder who hired workers at different times of the day and paid them all equally, a day's wage;

✠ the truth about TIMELY ACCEPTANCE OF THE GRACE OF GOD, the story of the father who asked both sons to work as if to teach that salvation was for the first covenant people, Israel AND for those who accepted Jesus as the final word in the mighty acts of God to save all.

Signs were all around as Jesus taught the Parable of the Vineyard. One of only three parables (Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Mustard Seed are the other two) that appear in the first three (Synoptic) Gospels. It may have been taught as some asked, "Is there hope?" IS...THERE...HOPE?

The target audience seems to have been the chief priests and the Pharisees as the clouds of the end thickened! But, word also for those who would continue the mission of God after His ascension.

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants is first found in Isaiah 5. It is a story about the providence of God in caring for the people of promise in the face of hard time and in the midst of those who will not believe.

Creation-Time...A vineyard...a landowner who cares deeply: plants, digs, built, rented to those who would be stewards of his creation and left, trusting them to do their work.

Harvest-Time...servants sent to get the crop, but the farmers beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Pretty bad times!

Landowner sends his own (Perhaps, only!) son. (Catching the unfolding meaning?) The landowner so loved his creation, in turmoil, sent his own son. "They will honor my son."

"But when the farmers saw the son, they said to themselves, 'It's the heir, let's kill him, and get his inheritance.'" And they did. They took him, threw him out, killed him. Outside the vineyard as Jesus was crucified, outside the wall of the city.

Judgment -Time...Landowner brings consequences...new farmers. Old gives way to New! First covenant fulfilled in the new and with the One who is the very head of the corner. Jesus is Lord, Savior, and one who brings the fruits of the kingdom. Net result: The Temple folk (Don't forget that Jesus cleanses it twice in Matthew. Not a good idea!) They wanted to get him, they were afraid of the crowds who followed along with this one they thought only to be a prophet.

In the next verses, Jesus will teach about the signs of the end which every generation of Christian seems to sense if the time they/we live in. And in the next verses Jesus will teach that time will be hard, suffering will occur, signs will seem around every corner, but the end is known only to the God that Jesus invites us to know through Him. For "...of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels, nor the Son, but the Father only." Our call to watchfulness, stewardship, of all that God has given us to build a kingdom of hope, a people of peace in our time.

In the midst of our times, in this present time, we are to know the generosity of the love of God, the incredible sinfulness of human kind where oppression is real, untruth parades as truth, and evil people do evil things for reasons we may never know, the central gift of grace in the sending of the Son, to die for, to rise for us, to live through us, that judgment will come at the end of time, and NO OTHER will come from God except Jesus, Alpha and Omega, our Lord and Savior.

"Are these the last times? Is there hope?" They are the questions of every age of human history with one difference, we live lives in the 24/7, social media driven, breaking news world where the "signs" roll by us nearly every minute of the day.

I believe that the moment of Jesus' death and the power of His resurrection marked for us the end of time. And the true end of me is the end of time for me and the welcoming presence of God for all who are marked with the Cross.

In this present day, with all that sets the seeds of fear, anxiety, doubt; with all of the darkness and evil that seem to have it their way, we are a people of infinite confidence as we trust God, walk with Jesus, and listen to the Holy Spirit.

Hope is the ground upon which we stand as those who know that because Christ Jesus has made me, made us, his own we learn to forget what lies behind and pressing on, moving forward to what lies ahead...toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

We are building the Body of Christ and the cornerstone is set secure for our pathways to renewal, being DiscipeFit, moving into new days of Ministry, being remodeled by the power of the Holy Spirit, built up in love and in peace. As we do, each of us has a **circle of concern** where prayer counts and **a circle of influence** where, in actions, we find the pathway to change life locally for the good and as witness to all that we have been.

Isaiah promised it; Paul was changed by it; we witness to it in word and deed; that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In our lives we are fed with the seeds of newness and are meant to be beacons of the presence of God in Christ. So, here is the challenge: in these fall days, check the pace of your lives knowing that slower is not bad.

Speak gently, live in relationships that are reconciled and redemptive. Confess the name of Savior knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. And seek the guidance of the Spirit to be hope-filled no matter what the "signs" seem to be.

Dissonance will never go away; the unity we share is the harmony people will learn when our lives rhyme with the Cross of Christ, the love of Christ proclaims with RESTS and GRACE NOTES that show us to be the people of God.

It is the author Frederick Buechner who makes the case for how Christians are called to live this side of heaven---THE PLACE GOD CALLS YOU TO IS THE PLACE WHERE YOUR DEEP GLADNESS AND THE WORLD'S DEEP HUNGER MEETS."

May it be so for us this day and in the new days of our life together. In Jesus' name, let it be, AMEN.