

Sermon Nov 8 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen

We are now officially post-election

But it is a mixed bag: Seems to have concluded. Networks/media outlets that report on vote totals have counted it all up, and Biden seems to have won.

Yet the President is still pressing lawsuits to either get the vote counting stopped, or disqualify certain ballots. It remains to be seen whether he will prevail in this attempt.

In the meantime, many are elated, eager to accept results.

Others are deeply disappointed, and hesitant to accept results

Points to what we already know, the country is deeply divided

And there may be a few more weeks of some uncertainty, and even turmoil

Nevertheless, we have our calling as citizens

To vote, to stand up for what we believe is best for the country, and to represent competing claims and ideas with honesty and charity

But we are also the church of Christ in the world

We are the body of Christ in the world, called to speak of the hope that is within us

To minister to the world in the presence of Christ

To promote the reconciliation in truth that Christ brings

This reconciliation is not smoothing over differences, but it is a reconciliation based on the love of God in Christ that we need not fear death, we need not fear judgement or shame, we need not fear each other, and we need not fear God's justice, but that we are called to be reconciled to one another because God loves us all the same, and forgives us equally for our sins.

We see our brokenness as a people playing out in our everyday political life, and we feel that brokenness in our relationships with others. Yet Christ calls us be reconciled to God, through his grace, and thus we become able through grace to love our selves and love each other, even when we are so different from each other, so distant in perspective, so afraid to come together in humility and put others ahead of ourselves.

This is what we as Christians are called to in our baptism, and Christ continues to calls us forward. But it is not easy. We would like to go slowly, at our own pace, to adjust to the most personally uncomfortable aspects of this work of reconciliation. The concessions I must make in humility and love are not ones I make easily or quickly.

Yet, Today's' gospel lesson speaks of the urgency of knowing Christ's calling, and it spells out the consequences of not being prepared to respond appropriately to this calling.

Matt's parable paints the Kingdom as being like the situation of a bridegroom, coming to the party. The bridesmaids want to welcome him, the best bridesmaids are ready to welcome him when he comes, but some are more prepared than others.

The oil in their lamps seems to symbolize the spirit of acceptance of Christ's call for reconciliation. As we hear the parable, we are being called out by the spirit: Are you ready for Christ to come?

And that coming is not simply the 2nd coming, as if that's the only thing we have to worry about. Yes, The truth is that Christ comes to the world at the end, and that is what we hope for, but Christ also comes to the world at every moment in time.

The church confesses that Christ is present in the world because he is risen, and because he has sent the Spirit into the world, and Christ makes his presence known in moments of existential truth, when a person's conscience is moved to acknowledge the righteousness of God in the grace God shows to other people. It is the Spirit's work in the church and the world to reveal God's grace as God gives it.

So we are warned by the parable, be like the 5 bridesmaids who were prepared, who thought ahead, who did the extra work before hand, so that they might be ready when the bridegroom appears.

The grace of God that shows up, when and where we least expect it, and which forces us to adjust to the dignity and justification of other people before God, is, thankfully the same grace that shows up for us, and which raises us up from our own guilt and shame, and which gives us courage when our hearts falter.

Praise be to God, for God's love shown in Christ to us proves God's love for us, and lifts us up again, to stand in the presence of god and one another, fully reconciled, fully justified, fully who we were meant to be as God's children.

Now as we go back again and again into a weary, conflicted, tumultuous world, we ask god in the spirit of the parable, to fill our lamps, give us oil, provide what we need so that we may be ready.

The camp song I used to sing,

Give me oil in my lamp, keep it burnin burnin burnin, give me oil in my lamp I pray, give me oil in my lamp keep it burnin burnin burnin, keep it burnin to the break of Day.

Give us that oil Lord, give us your grace, give us the courage and vision that comes from your holy spirit, and help us to be your church, in your world, through your grace, with patience, humility, and compassion to be your children in Christ's service.

I end with a prayer from the American theologian, Rienhold Niebuhr.

"Look with mercy upon the peoples of the world, so full of both pride and confusion, so sure of their righteousness and so deeply involved in unrighteousness, so confident of their power and so imprisoned by their fears of each other. Have mercy upon our own nation, called to such high responsibilities in the affairs of humankind. Purge us of the

vainglory which confuses our counsels, and give our leaders and our people the wisdom of humility and charity. Help us to recognize our own affinity with whatever truculence or malice confronting us that we may not add to the world's woes by the fury of our own resentments. Give your Church the grace in this time to be as a saving remnant among the nations, reminding all people of the divine majesty under whose judgment they stand, and of the divine mercy of which they and we have a common need. Amen.”

(from Reinhold Niebuhr, *Justice and Mercy*, edited by Ursula M. Niebuhr [New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974], pp. 97-98.)