

“Testify”

Luke 21:5-19

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost/Pledge Sunday

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Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right. The Apostle Paul's words to some of Jesus' earliest followers, I believe still have power for us today: Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right. Apparently in the original Greek, this line is only **three** words long. As is often the case in the work of translation, it's difficult to capture the sense of the phrase, so English and many other languages have had to add some words, which each translation tends to do a bit differently. The truth, then, of what Paul is trying to tell us can likely be found in one or more of these phrases: “Don't get tired of doing what is right. Don't get sick of doing good. Keep on keeping on in doing good things. Never stop lifting up those around you if you can. Don't ever give up on doing good. Do whatever good you can, whenever you can, wherever you can, in whatever ways you can -- even if you don't actually **have** to.”

In today's gospel, Luke paints a pretty bleak, though vivid picture of a world in chaos. It's apocalyptic, in the truest sense of the word. Jesus speaks of wars and insurrections, of earthquake, famine and plague, of persecutions, betrayals and detentions. Can't you just feel the dread, the despair, the shattered hope?

Some of us feel it quite acutely this week—a sense of dread, and shattered hope—following our recent election. Others of us do not; some are satisfied or even ecstatic over the outcome. It's true that we are all in many different places following this election, perhaps even more than we will ever fully know.

Still I would venture to say that whether you are one of us who feel a sense of triumph or elation, or one of us who feel defeat and despair, we all of us feel to one degree or another the weariness as this brutal, divisive, ugly election season has come to an end. And though it is over, what remains are many of the divisions it either created or unmasked, as do many of the hurts,

And in the midst of this, Jesus says, “when the time comes, do not prepare your testimony ahead of time—rather, rely on me, and I will give you the words to speak.” Sorry, Jesus, but I can assure you that that is NOT how it worked for me, not this week, at least, as I poured over every word on every email, every letter, every facebook post, yes, even this sermon—especially this sermon!—wanting to get my testimony just right. Still, after all that preparation, all those drafts, and all the wordsmith-ing, it is inadequate; and yet what I feel called to testify is this:

Let us not grow weary of doing what is right. Let us never tire from doing good.

Testimony gets a bit of a short shrift in the Lutheran church, at least in the version of the Lutheran church most dominant here in the upper Midwest. Other Christian congregations and denominations, particularly from communities of color, have much to teach us in this regard. To be fair, on those occasions we do offer our testimony, whether sharing a faith story at a Lenten service or words of remembrance at a funeral, or offering a ministry minute during stewardship time, even the most unprepared of testimonies can be quite moving.

With all these contexts in mind here is the testimony I feel called to make today:

- I am called to testify to the fact that Christ the King is a vibrant, vital congregation—a group of flawed but forgiven followers of Jesus whose ministries we should all be proud of, as I know I am.
- I can testify to the fact that though only 55 years old, we are a congregation whose ministries are known for their excellence, for their impact in the wider world, for the way they form our faith and transform our community.
- I feel compelled to share this testimony, too: that are all going to have to step up—each and every one of us—to more fully support the ministries of this congregation, giving more financially, volunteering more of our time, offering more of our God-given gifts in leadership in order to sustain and adapt these ministries in the midst of our rapidly changing congregation and community
- I can testify to the fact that we are a congregation still in the midst of a great transition, a generational shift, more than a mere changing of the guard in terms of lead pastor or other staff. Friends, I do not believe that our time of transition is over. We need the soul-saving endurance Jesus talks about in the gospel lesson today.
- At the same time, let me testify to the fact that we follow Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. We trust in an Almighty God who will never leave us or forsake us, whose mercies endure forever, whose steadfast love never comes to an end, whose grace is sufficient for us all. We are empowered and accompanied by the Holy Spirit with all that we need to accomplish everything we're called to do.
- I will testify to the fact that we are a congregation that loves our neighbors

as we love ourselves. And that's what we're going to keep on doing, loving our neighbors. Our immigrant and refugee neighbors. Our Muslim neighbors. Our LGBTQ neighbors. Our differently-abled neighbors. Our ecumenical and interfaith neighbors. Our mentally ill neighbors. Our economically-challenged neighbors. Neighbors who voted differently than we did. And, yes, also those neighbors who look just like us, act just like us, and believe just like us.

- As those who bear the name of Christ, we are called right now to be reconciled to one another in the midst of existing and growing divisions among us—whether those divisions are related to age, tradition, language, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, liturgical preference, longevity at CTK, socio-economic standing, or political viewpoint. We are going to tear down walls and build bridges, extend the table of hospitality, and seek out the viewpoints of those who see the world differently from us.
- At the same time, as followers of Jesus, we absolutely cannot be reconciled to evil, we will not be silent in the face of oppression, and we will never accept or tolerate behavior that expresses or encourages racism, sexism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, able-ism, ageism, whether in our church, our schools, our homes, or in the larger political sphere.
- I testify to you that I remain called by God to lead you in the midst of these uncertain times—within CTK and in our wider society
- I testify to you that I will renew my commitment to lead collaboratively, creatively, missionally, and pastorally in the midst of on-going change and potentially difficult decisions in the coming years.
- I commit myself to being and becoming more open, more available, more patient, less anxious, and less defensive among you. I testify to you that I will continue striving to do my best to respond to God's call using the gifts I have been given—including the gift of all of you.
- I feel called to testify that because of Christ the King's amazing, phenomenal history of ministry and not in spite of it, I truly believe that our best days of ministry to one another and to the world around us are in the future, not in the past. We need to claim that more and more and starting living into it. That is my testimony today.

Friends, we must never get tired of doing what is right. We cannot get worn out doing the good God calls us to do. We've got to never stop lifting up all those around us, even when it seems easier not to. We must do whatever good we can, whenever we can, wherever we can, in whatever ways we can—even when we don't actually **have** to. Let this be our testimony: that

Goodness is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate.
Light is stronger than darkness. Life is stronger than death.
Vict'ry is ours, Vict'ry is ours, Through Christ who loves us.
Vict'ry is ours, Vict'ry is ours, Through Christ who loves us.