

Sermon November 29th, 2020

God's Words Will Not Pass Away

There is a common theme in the readings we hear this morning. Though God's people suffer God does not abandon them. God sends someone into their lives to give them hope that God's words, God's promise will not pass away. No matter how long they suffer for.

God will give them what they need to stay awake. To remain hopeful in God's promise, that one day they will experience God's healing and restoration from their suffering.

In our reading of Isaiah, the people have been living in Babylonian exile for quite some time. Three generations have lived through this suffering and oppression. They are longing for liberation. They are longing to return to their Land. They are longing to be reunited with their loved ones (**Image**). They are longing to worship God without facing persecution. They are longing to rebuild their Temple. They are longing to be free.

So, God sends them prophet after prophet to give them hope that God has heard their prayers, and that soon God will liberate them from Babylon.

Isaiah is one of these prophets that God sends to God's people during their exile. And like the ones before them, Isaiah reassures God's people that God is one who answers prayers. God is one who will heal and restore God's people. They just need to hang on a little longer (**Image**).

Throughout the gospels, starting with Luke's birth story of Jesus, we see that Jesus is sent to God's people to give them hope in God's promise that God will liberate God's people from Roman oppression. God will heal and restore God's people from their suffering. God will do this through God's one and only Son, Jesus.

So, Jesus spends three years of his life teaching, healing, feeding those living in poverty, showing hospitality to the marginalized (**Image**), and challenging the authority's oppressive words and actions. Jesus spends three years of his life liberating people from their sufferings. Jesus spends three years of his life showing those who followed him what the kingdom of God looks like. Jesus spends three years of his life mentoring a group of people to continue to reveal where this kingdom is at work in the world.

In our gospel this morning, as Jesus is ready to face death for his liberation efforts, Jesus gives his followers a vision of what the world will look like when Jesus comes back again. Through this vision, Jesus reassures them that they will dwell in God's presence forever. Through this vision, Jesus reassures them that God's words, God's promise will never pass away. Through this vision, Jesus reassures them that they will experience God's healing and restoration from their suffering. Even as they are about to watch their mentor be crucified. Even though they will still suffer at the hands of the Romans for years to come.

Paul and Mark share these words of Jesus with the early believers as they continue to face persecution and suffering for sharing the good news of Jesus. As they anxiously await Jesus' return. "Just hang in their a little longer" they hear **(Image)**. Jesus will return soon. This is a certainty.

Leaders in our faith communities throughout the centuries continue to share these words of hopeful promise with us as we face suffering. They stand at their pulpits, and reconnect us to the Word of God where we hear about people's experiences of God's healing and restoration **(Image)**. They connect us to personal stories in our context where people experience God's healing and restoration. They encourage us to open up our Bibles and daily reflect on where God is present in our lives, and to look for what healing and restorative acts God has done to breath new life into us.

As our gospel says, we believe that Jesus' coming again is a certainty. We just don't know when. We believe in Jesus' healing and restoration. We just don't know when. We believe that we need to wait. We just don't know how long.

For the Israelites living in Exile. For the early believers living through Roman persecution. We see that the waiting was hard at times. They needed to dig down deep to find the faith needed to keep hoping in this promise that one day they will experience God's healing and restoration. They needed to be a support for one another. Lifting each other up with these words of hope. They needed leaders to keep reassuring them of these words. Of this promise.

As we walk through this pandemic together. Our faith tells us that Jesus' healing and restoration for our lives and our community is a certainty. It will come soon. And yet, here we are, almost a year into the pandemic, and still

feeling the suffering and loss that has come from this tragedy. We are now living through more restrictions again, as we try to get control of this virus. We are feeling isolated and wounded. Like the Israelites did during exile. Like the early believers did during the persecution they faced. We are suffering. Standing before God wondering when.

As Jesus said to his disciples. As Isaiah said to the Israelites. I reassure you that soon we will experience healing and restoration from this suffering. I just can't tell you when. The recent news of vaccines has made this reality more promising. But I still can't tell you when.

All I can say as the leaders before us said, is soon. We will experience Jesus' healing and restoration from this pandemic. Soon. Until that day comes, we are invited to wait. To stay awake (**Image**). To remain hopeful in this promise. To do whatever we can to be a loving neighbor (**Image**). To support one another through this time. To look for the little moments where we see God's healing and restoration at work in our lives during this pandemic.

This is the spirit of the season of Advent that we begin this week. Advent is a season of hopeful waiting. Today we lit the candle of hope (**Image**). To reassure us that even in the darkest moments of our lives and of our world God's light of hope is still lighting our way. God is still present in our lives through the Holy Spirit. Walking with us during this pandemic. Promising us that one day God will make everything right.

Let us pray, loving God, as our suffering intensifies during these more recent restrictions, and as cases continue to overwhelm our health system, give us what we need to stay awake. To remain hopeful in your promise that one day we will experience your healing and restoration from this pandemic life we are living. **Amen.**