

Sermon November 18th, 2018

Jesus Gives Us Hope

Jesus' words this morning to his disciples sounds like a doom and gloom message doesn't it? For instance, the very Temple they grew up worshipping in and admiring will soon be destroyed. There will be dissension within their own religious community. There will be wars, famine, and natural disasters of epic proportion. Their lives will be a 24 hour a day re-enactment of being in labor. Doesn't sound too pleasing does it?

In fact, throughout Jesus' life and into the first and second generation of Christians after Jesus' death and resurrection, unrest continued to grow and stir as people were dissatisfied with how the Roman Empire was treating them. Many people tried to incite a rebellion against the Roman Empire, just hoping to change their fortunes.

By the time Mark retells Jesus' story the church is on the verge of witnessing a massive rebellion that would lead to the destruction of the Temple.

As, these tensions between the people and the Empire were going on. There was lots of dissension within the Jewish and Christian Communities. For example, within the Jewish community the Pharisees and Sadducees clashed often on social, theological, and political issues. The Sadducees believed in tolerating the Roman Empire with the hope that the Emperor would continue to allow the High Priests some power over their own people.

The Pharisees believed more deeply in opportunities to challenge the Empire. They more so than the Sadducees wanted a Messiah who would come and lead them in a rebellion against the Empire.

Similarly, when the church was more established and Gentiles became included into the fold they had similar problems to their Jewish counterparts. Paul spends so much of his time trying to heal the conflicts that are occurring between different Christian sects at this uncertain time. Some wanted to take up arms and fight. Others tried to stress non-violence. Paul himself opposed any violent rebellion.

Then as all this human turmoil was going on, Earthquakes and famines were often happening, causing mass damage and high death totals. So, Jesus' words were reflecting the times they were in, not just some future prophecy of what is to come.

When we hear these words in our 21st century context we often look at our own situation and like the early believers, think "Jesus must be coming back soon."

In fact, our situation is very comparable to first century AD. For example, the institutional church is going through major changes as many have disconnected from it. Like the destruction of the Temple, churches all over the Western hemisphere are closing. St. John's in Calgary closed last year.

We continue to see so much division within the church as different leaders pull people in different directions over contentious issues we experience in the societies we live in.

In Europe, America, and even Canada we have seen movements that have people worry that we may be in for another war. People's views are becoming more and more polarized from one another. Voices that promote division are speaking louder right now than those that preach unity.

And then the fires in BC, the tornado in Ottawa, the hurricanes down south, the earthquakes that have hit South America and Asia, and the more recent fires in California remind us that the intensity and duration of natural disasters are getting worse.

Like the early believers, many of us look at our times and believe that the end times are here. That Jesus may even come back in our life time.

So, at first glance, Jesus' words seem like a doom and gloom message. However, Jesus intentionally uses the image of birth pains to describe our suffering to give us hope that our pain will not last forever. Yes, many women would attest that the pain is insurmountable at times. Yes, for some these labor pains can go for quite a while. But, when that baby comes into the world. When that baby is laying in your arms. New life is experienced.

And so, what Jesus is really telling us is that Jesus breaks into our lives in the midst of all this suffering, in the midst of our labor pains, and breathes new life into us. Jesus does this through his life, death, and resurrection.

When we read our bibles, we see that the disciples, the early believers, experience new life. The kingdom of God is present in our world.

We see in our own lives that God is present. That through Christ Jesus we experience new life. We get relief from our labor pains. We experience moments where God's kingdom is truly transforming our lives and our societies.

Yet, we still experience some labor pains. We still are living in the birthing process. And so, this promise that Jesus makes with us today is more than moments of new life in the midst of labor pains. Jesus promises us that one day he will come again to make everything right. One day the kingdom of God will be the only kingdom we will know in this world. One day we will experience labor pains no more.

This message gives us hope not only for our world, but for our lives as we continue to face suffering. We believe deeply in Jesus' redeeming work and how that breathes new life into us.

And so, with this belief and hope we face these birth pains as people with a purpose to continue this redeeming work Jesus initiated in his life here with us. We don't give up or live as despaired people. We believe that God's kingdom has already broken into our world through Jesus and as the church we are called to continue revealing this kingdom to people. Showing them that even though we suffer, even though we still feel those birth pains. We still experience a world where violence and suffering impact our lives. We also, experience new life. We experience a world where Jesus's healing and redeeming love is shaping and changing us. And that one day, we will no longer feel any birth pains. Instead, we will be like those new parents sitting there with their child in their arms, amazed at the euphoria that new life breathes in us. And this feeling will last more than for a moment. It will last forever.

Let us pray, healing God, give us hope in your promise that through Jesus you will heal and redeem us. When we face suffering, give us endurance to continue to be your hands and feet in the world. Showing everyone, we encounter that your Kingdom is impacting our lives today. And that one day your Kingdom will be all we know. In Jesus name we pray **Amen**.