

“Everthing will be alright in the end and if it is not alright it is not the end.”

Proper 28/B 10/20/2024 By the Rev. Caro Hall; St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Atascadero, CA

It's unnecessary this morning to mention that we are living in a time of change. As a country, we are anticipating a big political change and most of us are uncertain, perhaps even fearful, about what the future holds and how it will all play out. And our scripture readings have also taken a sudden and abrupt turn.

Last week Jesus was sitting in the temple forecourt musing on the habits of privileged people and the challenges of being poor and without family. This week he's in a totally different mood saying, “When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.”

Sounds to me like he's been reading the New York Times!

We are at the turning of the church year. Next week we will celebrate Christus Rex – Christ the King, though I prefer to call it The Reign of Christ because we don't have a gender neutral word for King except Sovereign which has an archaic ring to it. Jesus was gendered but the Cosmic Christ, the Word of God, isn't definable in our limited human categories of male and female. The Christ transcends gender.

But I am getting a little off point here. Next week, we remember that at the end of time Christ will be all in all. That actually, Christ is already all in all, but we haven't grasped that yet and so humanity is still thinking that we are in control and continues doing our sinful thing. Next week, is the last Sunday of the church's year, and celebrating the Reign of Christ reminds us that, as Sonny, the optimistic hotelier in the movie The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel repeats again and again, “Everything will be alright in the end and if it is not yet alright it is not yet the end.”

But today we are only anticipating the end when all will be alright, and Christ's reign will be evident. Today we are still looking at the chaos, the

wars and rumors of wars, nations rising against nation, earthquakes, famine, drought, fire and flood. Today we are still living in the midst of difficult news whether personal, political or international.

I don't want to be a Pollyanna and suggest that nothing we fear is going to happen and that in our movie we will all be standing peacefully gazing at the sunset. Some of the things we fear may well happen. Our hope is not that God will protect us but that whatever happens God will sustain us and never leave us. And our hope is that our long term future lies in God's hands, a glorious future where everything is alright.

Some people think that if you live a good life and follow Jesus then peace and prosperity will follow. But that's not what the Scriptures teach us. Throughout the Scriptures bad stuff happens to good people - and some good stuff too. But as followers of Jesus, we have to acknowledge that some pretty bad stuff happened to him even though he was good. Even though he was the Son of God, the Christ with flesh on, things didn't go so well. Yet resurrection happens too. Not immediately - there's always a day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and that day can last for a very long time, but resurrection comes in the end. For if everything is not yet alright, it is not yet the end.

Jesus said that all these horrible things, wars, rumors of wars, earthquake and famine are but the beginning of the birthpangs. Birthpangs means that a new beginning is on the way. New birth is not easy, nor is any kind of transformation. Our hope is that however dark things get, the light of Advent is coming. The Christ is coming into the world as a new born baby who will need protection and love and care.

And that, my friends, is our job.

Last week, Jill and I went to Woods and came home with a new dog. We hadn't really thought it out in advance. We didn't have any of the things

we needed to bring a new dog home, and we certainly weren't prepared for her crazy excited puppy energy. We were not at all ready.

As the season changes, our job is to get ready, to prepare for the Christ.

Our job is to continue to nourish and nurture the Christ light in one another and to hold on to hope in the midst of everything. That is to prepare for the coming of the Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews summed it up in the second lesson we heard today. "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

"He who has promised is faithful" – however dark things get, the light has come into the world and the One who promises new light and eventually resurrection is faithful. We can trust in God and in God's love which always encompasses and surrounds us whatever we are feeling, however life is going. So let us hold fast to our faith without wavering. That's our part – God is faithful so let us also be faithful and faith-filled, trusting that it will be alright in the end and if everything is not yet all right it is not yet the end.

But we don't keep our hope to ourselves, no – "let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another." Hope shared increases. As we seek to love God and our neighbor, as we learn to rest in the all-encompassing and astonishing love of God, we do this in community with one another.

There are no lone rangers in the reign of God. As we meet together to worship God, to discern God's direction for St Luke's and to pray for

healing, we can encourage one another to keep going, to hold fast to our faith.

Because as St Paul said, “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Romans 8:38-39)

The One who has promised is faithful, so let us hold fast to our faith without wavering, confident in God’s love which never ends.