

Isaiah 65:17-25
Canticle 9 (*Isaiah 12:2-6*)
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
Luke 21:5-19

We are well into November and headed toward the end of the church year. So, predictably, we hear Jesus talking about the end of the world as we know it. "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues;... You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name." So what do we do with this message as we conclude our stewardship pledge campaign with the theme of "Now Thank We All Our God"? Do we say: Thanks Jesus, for letting me know that things really can get worse. Or, thanks for letting me know that no one is to be trusted. Or, thanks for the heads up. At least now I can start preparing for what is to come.

Despite its language and imagery of destruction, today's reading from Luke is ultimately a passage grounded in hope – hope because we believe that God remains present in this world and in our lives; hope because we have experienced God's love when we least expected it; hope because we have one another and that great cloud of witnesses. Remember Jesus said, "...not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls." Jesus doesn't promise pie in the sky in the near by and by. He doesn't ask us to put on rose-colored glasses. He doesn't try to pull the wool over our eyes. Jesus tells us that life will be challenging, that there will be set-backs, that there will be pain and sorrow and suffering. Yet in spite of all this, we will endure because we hope and trust in the God that Jesus revealed to us, a God in whose image we are made, a God who loves us beyond our understanding. God will enlighten us so that we will be faithful and true to God's ways, despite the challenges that confront us. God will protect us as we recognize our limitations, yet still participate in God's great mission of reconciliation. God will lead us along the pathways of peace and justice, even when we stumble and fall because of our self-centeredness. Now thank we all our God.

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians builds on this understanding of a world that is not yet perfect. Paul exhorted those early Christians to not be weary in doing what is right. He was not trying to establish social services policies for the city of Thessalonica. He was trying to establish an ethic among those who sought to follow Jesus. of "do good for others even when you don't have to." If there's something good that you can do, do it, Paul writes. If there's something good you can give, give it. If there is something good you can say, say it. Do whatever good you can, whenever you can, wherever you can, in whatever ways you can – even if you don't have to.¹ Now thank we all our God.

Tying both of these readings together are God's words spoken by the prophet, Isaiah: "...I am about to create new heavens and a new earth... be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating... no more shall the sound of weeping be heard... nor the cry of distress..." No matter what we have to endure during our lifetimes, God is in charge and is creating something new that will be the source of joy and gladness for all. No matter how bad things seem at the moment, trust in the God of our salvation who brings us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life. No matter how many times we have to endure the pains and

humiliations of our human condition, rely upon God's mercy and love which is poured upon us like the balm of Gilead to heal our sin-sick souls. Then together let us proclaim with Isaiah, "Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in God and not be afraid. For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and God will be my Savior." Now thank we all our God.

Over the past four weeks, we have been saying again and again, now thank we all our God. We have created a bouquet of thankfulness each week, using one flower stem to symbolize something we personally are thankful for, and adding it to all the other flower stems, expressing the thankfulness of all of us. We have heard about thankfulness from those preaching and from those among us who stand to give witness each week. Before we hear from today's witness, I want you to think about something you are thankful for right now. Got it? Now turn to the person next to you and tell them what you are thankful for. No need for an explanation – unless you want to give one – just tell them why you are thankful. And then invite them to do likewise. Now thank we all our God.

1. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3082