

NOVEMBER 8TH SERMON: "ARE WE READY?"

It's decision time in Joshua. Detailing the before and after of God's call to Abraham and the people's relationship to God as a result, Joshua tells those gathered they must commit to the God who called them. The time is now.

Paul, in this earliest of NT documents, assures that early Christian community anxious about those they love who have died before Christ's return that the time will come when everyone will be together, caught up in the clouds with their Redeemer. All time belongs to God and all people will be gathered up in it.

Finally, in Matthew's gospel, Jesus teaches through the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids that we cannot know the time of God's coming, but we can be certain that time will come and therefore always keep watch, be ready and prepared to welcome him.

The time is now to make a decision to follow God and God's ways. All time belongs to God. The time of Christ's return is unknown but certain. Past, present and future: God is and God acts. The juxtaposition of Joshua's ultimatum and Paul's pastoral assurance and Jesus' call for watchfulness, remind us on this Sunday after a bitter election, in a year of pandemic hardships, that God remains faithful to the covenant made with us in life and in death, no matter what happens in between. This truth gives us guidance for navigating this tumultuous time.

We are to:

Make a conscious choice regarding our ultimate loyalty. Choose this day, every day, each day, whom you will serve.

Be informed and encourage one another with the Word of God.

Be ready, prepared on watch to welcome the inbreaking of God whenever and wherever God appears.

On this Sunday after the election when our country remains divided and bitter partisanship threatens our union, in a year when our health and economic

well-being continues to be tenuous for many and upended for countless others, we are told to make time differently than the rest of our culture. We are living in and on borrowed time and this, for us, is good news. We are not our own. In life and death we belong to God. In the words of "A Declaration of Faith," we remember that "there is no event from which God is absent and God's ultimate purpose in all events is just and loving. That purpose embraces our choices and will surely be accomplished. The Creator works in all things toward the new creation that is promised in Jesus, the Christ." Such assurances grant us, with the help of the Spirit, a perspective through which to see our current events as a means through which to live in hope and act in love.

Such faithful living does not come easily nor inevitably, however. Christian discipleship in all its self-emptying is hard. Choosing to serve the living God who demands our all is difficult. Being informed in the Word and offering encouragement takes perseverance. Keeping oil in our lamps despite the late hour and our fatigue and disappointment, the distractions and disillusionment, the boredom or weariness or complacency or temptations, requires all virtues of Christ maturity we can muster and much intervention by the Spirit. We will fail often. We need to repent, ask for forgiveness, exercise humility and keep trying.

As our country reels from this election and the world suffers from COVID-19 and climate change and disasters natural and human caused, how will we, disciples of Jesus of Nazareth live and act in this time?

What do we need to do to be ready to meet Jesus in the middle of all of the fear and anxiety we face and absorb and feel and create?

It is time to decide whom we will serve and how that service will mark our ways of being in this world.

As we digest the election and contemplate what is next, as we pray about the state of our world and country, we are called to always be ready to expect and reflect our Redeemer, Jesus of Nazareth. Keeping the oil in our lamps that reveal we are the light of the world requires much of us. Ours is the oil of gladness that comes with making our unity, no matter our differences, manifest. Ours is the oil of anointing that marks us for priestly service that prays for everyone and asks God to intercede in ways that bring repair and reconciliation. Ours is the oil of healing that eases the suffering of those left beaten and battered by the side of the road. Ours is the fragrant oil of burial that the

women took to the tomb when they discovered it empty. Ours is the oil that consecrates spaces that remind us that we are on holy ground, in our sanctuaries and on our streets. Ours is the expensive oil that we pour out on Jesus' feet in adoration and worship, knowing that the unabashed love of God does not go unnoticed and bears witness to the grace we receive from Christ and extend in his name.

Now is the time to fill up our lamps with the oil of Scripture that informs and encourages and guides us. Now is the time to choose to serve our God no matter how much it requires or how much it puts us in contrast or even at odds with our culture. Now is the time to stock up on the oil of gladness and healing the oil of consecration and anointing. Fill up our lamps, keep them lit, and do not hide them under a bushel. Jesus is surely coming. All time belongs to God. No epoch of history is abandoned by the Creator. The God who so loves the world, enough to redeem it, calls us into covenant to love it, too. This is by no means easy. In fact, it requires all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Are we ready?

Amen and Amen!