

Reflection – “*Stay With It*”

Inspired by Isaiah 65:17-25 and Luke 21:5-19

Every week we pray for peace and an end to bloodshed. Every Sabbath there are heart-wrenching stories of so many of God’s children starving or thirsty. Every Sunday we hear about more abuse of authority, and violence against women. Racism, sexism and ageism are common. Every minister that has ever served you has prayed about the same things. Every minister that has served you and every one of you sitting in those pews this morning wishes we didn’t have to.

In today’s gospel Jesus says the root of all of this is because of him. Everyone will be at your throat because “you carry my name,” he says. “There is no telling who will hate you because of me.” He forewarns of the possible persecution of all his followers.

Given what we know of Jesus’ time before his arrest and crucifixion, that would have been the case. As a follower, a believer, one would want to stay as disassociated as possible. The risk of just being in Jesus’ company or of having known him could have serious consequences. Even “**parents, brothers, relatives, and friends,**” might turn you in Jesus says. And “**Some of you will be killed.**” Of course this was not of Jesus’ doing. Ego, selfishness and perversion were to blame.

We have firsthand knowledge of what unchecked ego and selfishness can do. We look around us and metaphorically see the Jerusalem temple being destroyed once more as war rages on in Palestine. Hatred lives there too. The powerful display their greed in the Russian invasion and the insatiable quest for notoriety of the US president. It is the Babylonian conquest again.

In some parts of our world, a world God so loves, associating with Jesus is still reason for imprisonment or worse. Loving one another equally and accepting our differences openly is not easy. The individual who worships a different God or who welcomes someone from the LGBTQ2+ community could suffer disastrous consequences.

But in the midst of gloomy predictions Jesus says, “***Stay with it to the end. You won’t be sorry; you’ll be saved.***”

I hear those words, I want to believe them. I want to be in the time of Isaiah when he predicts that Jerusalem will be sheer joy and people pure delight. I want to be in a time when there are “**No more sounds of weeping in the city, no cries of anguish; No more babies dying in the cradle.**” A time when “**One-hundredth birthdays will be considered normal—anything less will seem like a cheat.**”

I want to experience a time when there will be **No more building a house that some outsider takes over, No more planting fields that some enemy confiscates.** And most of all I pray, as we all do, that “**Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill anywhere on God’s Holy Mountain,**” a place of a divine presence, a place where we will all be safe, secure and can live without fear.

Oh, how I want to be in that time. Oh, how we all want to be. Oh how this seems so utterly fool hearty, so absolutely nonsensical.

Stay with it to the end Jesus Says, you’ll be saved. Stay with it Isaiah implies, there will be peace on God’s Holy Mountain. “***Stay with it.***” Stay positive, stay committed, stay engaged as we walk together in our ministry.

Stay with it to what end? What’s the promise? What is the possible outcome in a world so torn apart that on any given day we don’t recognize it.

God, could you give us something to go on? Isaiah promised a new heaven and a new earth after exile. Eight hundred years later the Jerusalem temple is destroyed once again. We wonder if much has changed over the ages as striking down remains much more prevalent than building up. Can we have any faith in Isaiah’s prophecy?

Perhaps.

I pose a question, what good does committed discipleship accomplish? What does care, compassion, abiding and forgiving do? What happens when we share our love unconditionally?

We deflect the negative chatter around us when we do that. We don't give evil a chance to take root and flourish. We don't allow the dismay or the darkness to overcome us. Regardless of dismal daily news which spreads fear and divisiveness, we stay positive. Those actions foster hope within this community and that is a starting place for new beginnings. Those attitudes prop up diminishing spirits. They are the fertilizer that is needed for love to grow.

And something else happens too.

Deep within each of us is a unique soul. That is the place where your spirit lives. This is your inner being, the DNA of your personhood. When your soul is nurtured, you are buoyed, content, upbeat, positive. When your soul is neglected, you are more likely to feel depressed, lonely, unsure, frustrated.

I think "staying with it" has a lot of potential to uplift the soul. The giver of a grace-filled act receives grace in return. When we offer the gift of love it often bounces back and nourishes our inner self. Being a light in the world to others encourages our own inner light to shine brighter.

Christmas is around the corner. How many of you can recall an incident where the gift you gave someone gave you more pleasure than the receiver. It resonated with your soulful self, and your felt jubilant. Your soul sang.

Does decorating the Hall for Christmas sales feel like a lot of thankless work, or does it nourish your soul in some way? From the laughter and chatter I heard last week from my office, I would say it is the later. How does knowing we house the Wellness Centre's bereavement group make you feel? How do you feel when you are involved in this ministry? Is working with the board, assisting with renovations or participating in worship a real bore or do you find it nurturing? Is volunteering at the BBin soul nurturing work? Perhaps your soul is being enriched.

Staying with it is good for our souls.

I'm wondering about one other thing this morning. I've always been curious about salvific language. I don't use it much. In fact I'm mostly adverse to "being saved" language, because it is often associated with an omnipotent God doing something to us. That is not my understanding of God. However, in Luke's context, as I re-read vs 19 I wonder.

"Stay with it to the end. You won't be sorry; you'll be saved," says Jesus.

This says to me, stay together, walk with one another in ministry. Don't let the negative influences dissuade you from your tasks. In doing that work you will continually bring hope into the world. And at the same time you will nurture your inner-being, your spirit centre, your soul. I see that as saving us from becoming victims of a time where we feel there is too little love being shared.

In the big picture we all want to save the world. I'm a believer that what we do in ministry together does help. So we "stay with it." Keep doing what we can celebrating that in our work we nurture our souls, let God sing within us and let us be saved.

Thanks for listening this morning. Amen