

Grateful Disciples: Blessed to Hold On

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight O Lord, you who are rock, redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen. (Ps 19:14)

Grace and Peace be with you, dear Friends!

How is it with your soul, Grateful Disciples? How's goes it in participating in building God's kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven this week?

Have you had a 'heart-strangely-warmed' moment; an awareness that God loves you just as you are? Felt the kindling of a fire in your heart?

The gospel story today is an opportunity to enter into just such a moment, walking with Jesus out of the Temple...across the valley - climbing the Mount of Olives to gaze back at the temple's stone structure. Leaning in close to Jesus you ask the question filling your mind all the up the hill... 'When will these things happen?'

The truth is... these things happen time after time. It would be 33-40 years for the temple in Jerusalem to fall in the Jewish Revolt (66-70ce). There would be earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, wars & atomic bombs; there would be the twin towers in new York, the cathedral of Notre Dame in France, and the high rise building in Florida.

And Jesus tells us...Don't be alarmed. And in that moment, sitting there with Jesus, my heart is on fire. Is yours? Is your heart on fire?

In that moment, what I hear in my heart is an assurance of a love so great that there is nothing to worry about for the future.

Let me be clear... I know that things will fail... brick, mortar, steel, cement, stone, wood, plaster, sheetrock...all of it. But in that moment I realize there is one who will not fail.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews assures us once again just who Jesus is and why Jesus is above all. Jesus is the only high priest whose sacrifice destroyed every barrier between God and humanity. The wall was broken down, the veil was torn, and a way was opened to God.

We are pardoned; we are redeemed. Yet we live in a liminal time [an in-between time] between Christ's 'provisional' victory over the powers of sin and death and the final victory when 'his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet' (v13, Ps110:1).

The question is: How then shall we live?

The writer offers us, the community of the faithful, three points of action: we are invited to draw near, to hold on, and to motivate one another to show love.

Let's draw near with a genuine heart (v22). We are invited to live with confidence in the fact that we are cleansed, forgiven, and restored in right relationship with God. We need not fear! We are children of God and loved beyond measure.

Let's hold on to the confession of our hope (v23). Our hope is in the Lord who will renew the face of the earth. Jesus has fulfilled his mission and is waiting for God's work to be done, when Christ comes again. We will need to persevere in the challenging times, trusting and counting on God's faithfulness, not our own effort.

And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds (v24). This is where community matters! We are to encourage each other, spur each other on to grow and mature as we fulfill our baptismal vows in love and good deeds. Sometimes these good deeds require acts that speak against unjust status quo. This is just the kind of encouragement given by Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. in his letter from the Birmingham Jail. This is just the kind of encouragement given by Rep. John Lewis in crossing the Pettis Bridge. This is just the kind of encouragement that seeks to support equal access to broadband for learning in all communities.

There is a cost in the sacrifice of time, presence, gifts, service & witness to invite someone to join in bible study, or set up a new time to meet people in the parking lot, or offer your screened porch for a small group to meet, or to serve meals to hungry or purchase food expressly for the food bags program or to make a pledge to increase giving in the next year.

Jesus does not give the answer Peter, James, John & Andrew or you & I want on the matter of ‘when’ will these things happen.

Jesus says, don’t be alarmed... stuffs gonna happen. But you...you are blessed if you draw near, hold on, and stick together in love.

We have journeyed with Jesus, kindling Hearts on Fire, been intentional in generosity of our gifts, prayers, presence, service and our witness. We’ve learned, the call to Discipleship, taking up the cross, involves a commitment to let go of this world (its things, its ways) and to participate in a life of grace (regular spiritual practices/holy habits) reflects priorities of JOY (Jesus, Others, Yourself).

We are fast approaching the season celebrating the coming of Christ

Recall how the offerings of prayers, presence, gifts, service & witness to you and others have shed Christ’s light for you. Remember:

- Christ is counting on us to respond to the calling to be at work bearing the light of Christ so that others draw near, hold on & mature in loving and serving others

I give thanks for you, dear friends, that you spur one another on, and me as well, to be more like Christ.

Friends, What one thing will you do differently this week because of this Word? May it be so. So be it. Amen.

Let us JOIN TOGETHER WITH THE LITURGIST, Maryanne Espenshade, AS SHE LEADS us in prayers for God’s people, church & World ...

It is impossible to know in the moment, how a small act of goodness will reverberate through time. The notion is empowering and it is frightening—because it means that we’re all capable of changing the world, and responsible for finding those opportunities to protect, feed, grow, and guide love.

—Bishop Michael Curry