

Sunday, November 14, 2010  
Lectionary 33  
Proper 28  
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Malachi 4:1–2a  
Psalm 98  
2 Thessalonians 3:6–13  
Luke 21:5–19  
Year C

I.N.I.

Happy 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost! It doesn't get any higher than this. Next week is Christ the King Sunday, and then we turn over another year into Advent. It used to boogie my mind and I guess it still does that the church began its green season as Spring was springing and now we are in our last day to put green out on this pulpit and on this pastor at mid-November. While in the last week of green here inside, outside dead leaves are practically throwing themselves on the ground from the trees, it seems like the sun is snuffing itself out, and the spectacular oranges, reds, and yellows on the landscape are, as they say, muted. From Easter joys for Fifty Days we have arrived at this day, which I call the **umpteenth** Sunday after Pentecost.

It's all about the end. The end of the world, the end of time, the end of life. There is an old B.C. cartoon with the kooky bearded harbinger of doom carrying his placard which reads: "Repent! The end is near. And then in small letters "if you have already repented, please disregard this notice."

Earlier this summer, when things were quite green, we read with great anticipation (or at least I did) way back in Luke 9, "when the days grew near for him to be taken up, he set his face toward Jerusalem." Way back then, Jesus already was focused on the end. And he walked resolutely, gathering those who would listen to his teachings, healing those with infirmities, confronting powers and principalities, sharing meal fellowship with Pharisees and tax collectors, all moving closer and closer to the place where meaning will be piled up as high as a skyscraper, at the great climax of the gospel.

Now as we hear heightened language and ramped up rhetoric, we are near the end of Jesus' life. Now we are near the end of Luke's Gospel. We are in Jerusalem. We have arrived at the temple. Moments before, a poor widow has just made the temple box faintly clink with her two coins, a great act of stewardship because as Jesus noticed he declaimed she gave out of her poverty, she gave what she really didn't have to give, she gave it all! And while Jesus notices and lifts up this blessed poor one, others get stuck on all that glitters, the bejeweled temple, starry-eyed and missing out on the floor boards coming apart, the roller coaster taking its unexpected dive, the creation going topsy-turvey, your worst nightmare coming true, the end!

Here now, in these last days of green, we cling to what seems strong, and discard the weak like yesterday's trash. Like the pilgrims in the gospel, we admire big and formidable buildings for their sense of permanence, and then the date 9/11 draws a line between what we thought was comfortable and predictable and what has become helter skelter and uncertain.

How do we navigate endings? How do we stay above water while the ship is sinking? Do we run for our lives, or build a bunker stocked with cans of sardines? Do we shout "The end is near?" and wait on the highest peak for the coming of the Lord? What is the date we can enter into our Blackberrys so that we can prepare for the Apocalypse?

Jesus speaks of great turmoil and great tribulations, of calamity and trials, of traitors, and earthquakes, and while he ramps it up he also adds qualifiers.

Beware that you are not led astray.

Do not be terrified.

This will give you an opportunity to testify.

But not a hair of your head will perish.

We are to live as if there is no tomorrow, while keeping on keeping on. We might be caught in the nightmare of Haiti's earthquake and cholera aftermath, or Indonesia's volcanic eruption, but instead work to rebuild, so that life may emerge out of the rubble. The end will signal a new beginning, like the fabled Phoenix rising with wings, or the sun of righteousness referenced in Malachi, with healing in its wings.

Eloissane lost everything on January 12, 2010. For him and his family, after the earthquake in Haiti, it might have signaled the end. More than 200,000 people died. Eloisane lost his home, and joined the 3 million homeless.

Community-based ELCA Disaster Response partners responded immediately, providing emergency food, water, medical supplies and shelter. In the weeks following the earthquake, these partners worked to build water and sanitation systems, provide long-term access to education, establish health services and provide trauma therapy.

Eliossane and his family are receiving care from the Lutheran Church in Haiti, which is supported by our gifts to ELCA Disaster Response, part of the World Hunger Appeal. They are filled with hope and determination to help themselves and their neighbors down the long road to recovery from the earthquake. <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Responding-to-the-World/ELCA-World-Hunger/Stories/By-Region/Latin-America/Haiti-f10.aspx>

I am strengthened by the consistent, long-term, hand-on work of Lutherans throughout the world. When I've visited Palestine/Israel, I've discovered that Lutherans, though a minority in numbers are well-known for their educational and social programs. Augusta Victoria Hospital, Lutheran World Federation's presence on the Mount of Olives, is a shining light for Palestinians who lack

adequate access to health care. Since 1948, the work has endured. Mark Brown, my friend who directs LWF Jerusalem, says with a sigh that in 1948 Lutherans began to assist refugees and still in 2010 they continue to assist refugees.

In the midst of trial and tribulation, Jesus offers hope. Malachi, which is where in the Old Testament? At the end!, Malachi, God's messenger, speaks of healing from the rubble.

In Second Thessalonians, which is where in the New Testament? The end?! Sorry, the middle, the writer addresses those who are responding to the end by doing a lot of nothing. They were content to wait as if there was no tomorrow because they thought "well, there's no tomorrow."

The advice is to continue to work, so that Christians do not get reputations as lazy slobs.

Martin Luther reportedly was asked what he would do if he knew the world was ending tomorrow. And his answer: plant a tree!

The end is near. Do not grow weary, but lean on God, who is more ready to give than we are to receive, who is more ready to hear than we are to pray.

Jesus, at the end of his life, gave out his Spirit. This Spirit is alive and well in us, who continue to testify to new life. It is evident in our World Hunger and World Federation programs. It is evident as here we offer relief, joy in the journey, and an openness to what's new in the ways of God at Bethesda.

It might require a fire to burn off what's dead. It certainly will require planting of some manner of seed to promote growth. Mostly, it will take an act of God, who will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity.

It's the end, of my sermon.

I.N.I.