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Pentecost 28C
Peace, Seattle
November 13, 2016
Psalm 91, Isaiah 40:26-31, Luke 21:5-19
Grace, mercy & peace from the God who renews our strength and raises us up on eagle's wings...

SOARING

It's been a surreal week, has it not?

A whole range of thoughts and emotions have been competing for bandwidth in my head and heart since Tuesday, as I try to wrap my mind around the new reality we face as a nation and as a world with Donald Trump as president-elect.

And I got to tell you, I'm not there yet.

Anxiety is always present when there's a shift of power in the oval office.
But this time it seems particularly acute. There are so many unanswered questions.

- With the election over, will the vicious rhetoric cease?
- Will Trump transform himself from divisive candidate into a president for all the people?
- Will the wall be built?
- Will the worst fears of immigrant and refugee communities be realized?
- How will the next four years play out in our country?

Post-election incidents of bullying, harassment, and intimidation across the country by emboldened Trump supporters raise warning flags.

Whatever questions your wrestling with; whatever your process for coming to terms with the results of the election; however you may be feeling about it all; we come together as people of faith today—come together around the Word, around bread and wine—because this is where God promises to show up. And so God does.

> Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God...
> God does not faint or grow weary...God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless...
> Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
> they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
> they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.[1]

Whether we feel like soaring today or not, we've come. Whether we feel like the world we've known is collapsing or is on the verge of new possibilities, we've come.

And isn't it interesting that the gospel text which greets us today is a text in which Jesus, walking on the Temple grounds, talks with his friends about what to believe and how to act when facing an uncertain future?

What do we hold on to when the world we've known seems to be crumbling around us?

At the time Luke wrote his gospel, 50 years after Christ, this was more than an academic question.

- In 70 AD the Romans literally tore the Temple down stone by stone, just as Jesus prophesied.
- The cities of Judah were burned, their inhabitants executed or exiled; olive groves and vineyards were cut down; fields were sown with salt.

[1] Isaiah 40:28-31

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- So complete was Jerusalem's destruction that 1st century historian Josephus said it looked like a site that had never been occupied.
- The schism between Jews who embraced the Christian message and Jews who rejected it grew more volatile each year, and families and communities were being pulled apart.
- Every sign you could point to suggested the world was going to hell in a hand basket and there seemed precious little you could do about it.

So when Luke describes what Jesus saw and what he said as he moved through the Temple that day, there's no doubt Luke's audience is listening intently; hoping for something to hold on to; something that wouldn't fall apart, that wouldn't be dismantled or destroyed.

And do not we, in this post-election time, long for the same?

Our country is divided. Hateful rhetoric has degraded our political discourse.
And the institutions we put in place to help traverse times like these seem vulnerable.

In response, some have taken to the streets. Others have spoken words of conciliation.
Still others are holding their breath, waiting to see what will emerge.

Sisters and brothers, our mission of forming and raising followers of Christ who embody faith, hope and love in the world has never been more important.

For three weeks we've talked about our congregation as a NEST in which faith comes to birth and is fed; as a place where FLEDGLINGS grow and test their wings; and today we affirm our congregation's role as a FLIGHT TRAINING SCHOOL where the Spirit equips us to follow Jesus on wings of faith.

In the midst of change, keeping that trajectory in place is more critical than ever.

Change is always hard. We all know what it's like to leave behind something we've loved. What it's like to let go of people or places or ambitions that once were life giving but have become unsustainable. There's a grief that attends such changes—for all of us. Lament is important, and we ought not move away from it too soon.

But as much as Jesus joins us in our grief, fear, and anger, he doesn't leave us there.
He leads us toward hope.

Even as he tells his followers that the world as they know it is about to turn, he gives them a promise: DO NOT BE TERRIFIED, he tells them and us, NOT A HAIR OF YOUR HEAD WILL PERISH.

The thing about new beginnings is, they often feel more like death at first than birth.
Jesus doesn't deny that. In fact, he invites and even warns those who would follow him that death is exactly where he's headed because it's only through dying that resurrection becomes a possibility.

> **Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.[2]**

TRUST ME, says Jesus, THERE'S NEW LIFE WAITING ON THE OTHER SIDE.

[2] John 12:24

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When all hell breaks loose in our world and in our lives. When it feels like life is being dismantled bit by bit, and the things we believe in seem threatened at their very core, keep your heads up, says Jesus, because something new is also breaking in.

I heard an echo of this promise coming from the most unexpected source on Wednesday morning, when Hillary, in her concession speech, quoted Paul's letter to the Galatians: "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap in due time, if we do not give up."

Reinhold Niebuhr, the mid-20th century's most seminal theologian, writing after the greatest conflagration the world has ever seen—WW2—put it this way:[3]

- Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.
- Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.
- Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love.
- No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.

Sisters and brothers, this is the very kind of wisdom we are called to embrace and embody as a community of formation.

Building such a life together requires an ongoing commitment of our resources, energies, and gifts. That, in part, is what today is about.

The other part? The other part is always the same: to gain a vantage point whereby we can look toward the future with the eyes of Christ.

> "I suspect," writes Richard Rohr, "that we get the leaders who mirror what we have become as a nation. They are our shadow self for all to see. That is what the Jewish prophets told Israel… before and during their painful and long Exile.
>
> Yet Exile was the very time when the Jewish people went deep and discovered their prophetic voices—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others—speaking truth to power, calling for justice. Their experience laid the foundation for Jesus' teaching and solidarity with the poor and the outcast."
>
> Only a gospel-centered mind, Rohr concludes, is able to "hold our fear, confusion, vulnerability, and anger and guide us toward love." [4]

As we come to the Table this morning, we bring all those feelings with us. And laying them before our Lord, we receive with his body and blood the confidence and inner freedom to move out into the world with compassion, conviction, and hope.

Amen.

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[3] *The Irony of American History.*

[4] From Franciscan Richard Rohr's column following the election, edited, which you can find here: https://cac.org/rebuilding-bottom-reflection-following-election/