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Proper 28C
Peace, Seattle
November 17, 2013
Malachi 4:1-2a; Luke 21:5-19

WHEN THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT IS FALLING APART

It seems like so much is up for grabs these days.

The long awaited FEDERAL HEALTHCARE ROLLOUT has been one incredible bungle; creating doubt in the government's ability to deliver at the very moment when confidence was needed. The promise that folks could keep existing policies has proven to be wrong, and promised fixes are proving to be more complex and difficult than anyone imagined.

Then, in spite of State efforts to extract a long-term commitment from BOEING that would guarantee jobs—and breathing room—for decades to come, Wednesday's resounding NO VOTE by machinists once again raises the question of whether BOEING will keep its new production line—and the jobs that go with it—in Washington, or take it to another state.[1]

Meanwhile across the Pacific one of the most powerful storms ever recorded, typhoon Haiyan, has left the Philippines devastated, with untold thousands of lives & livelihoods washed away. Millions are affected and more than 600,000 have been displaced because of the storm, while thousands more in this country anxiously await news about relatives and loved ones.[2]

From healthcare to jobs to natural disasters, the world is feeling more vulnerable these days. And if you came to worship hoping for some modicum of relief from all that bad news, today's readings don't help out much!

- **Reading #1** Watch out! Lest you be burned to a stubble!
- **Reading #2** Slackers beware! No work, no eat!
- **Reading #3** Earthquakes, famines, wars, betrayals... everything's falling apart.

Not exactly the kind of good news we were hoping for!

Yet, when we drill down beneath it all, there are two questions worth asking this morning. Questions as germane to our time as it was in Jesus' time:

- **How do we live in a world where so much we depend on doesn't last?**
- **What do we hold on to when the world (at least what we know of it) is crumbling around us?**

At the time Luke wrote his gospel, 50 years after Christ, these were more than academic questions.

- In 70 AD the Romans literally tore down the Temple, stone by stone, as Jesus had prophesied.
- The schism between Jews who embraced the Christian message and Jews who rejected it was growing more volatile each year, and families and congregations were being split apart.
- Every sign you could point to suggested the world was going to hell in a hand basket and there was 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 won't fall apart, that won't be bungled or cancelled, dismantled or destroyed.
And do not we, in our own time, long for the same?

[1] http://seattletimes.com/html/businesstechnology/2022237073_boeingmachinistsxml.html
[2] http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2022215672_apxphilippinestyphoon.html

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Our systems are failing us. Our leaders are out of touch. The institutions put in place to help navigate rough waters have been springing leaks right and left.

As a result, public care systems, economic systems, social-ethical systems, and natural ecosystems are showing signs of stress and even, in some cases, collapse.

Now, the truth of the matter is, some structures in our world NEED to be dismantled: corrupt and arrogant systems that chew up lives and spit them out like refuse, that take advantage of the young, the elderly, and the vulnerable—disproportionately girls & women—to serve selfish needs and goals no matter the cost.

On Monday Chris and I attended the incredibly moving film GIRLS RISING[3] at the Admiral Theater—(Katharine and her mother Leslie were also there…)

GIRLS RISING documents the lives of nine girls from around the world who vow to get an education despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles in their paths.

From Cambodian to Afghanistan, India to Peru, Ethiopia to Nepal, each girl shares the incredible story of her striving to get a proper education and realize her true potential.

Watching their stories unfold and witnessing the immense obstacles that girls the world over face, is a galvanizing experience. I've put a link to the film on our website home page, and I encourage you to check it out.

HERE'S WHAT I LEARNED: When girls around the world have access to basic education, the systems that keep not only them but our whole world bound, enslaved, impoverished, and hopeless, begin breaking down. And something new and good begins to emerge.

Wherever and whenever transformation like that is taking place in the world, you can bet God's fingerprints are all over it—and ours ought to be, too.[i]

Later in the week I attended another gathering. This one pulled together pastoral leaders from throughout our synod for Bishop Unti's first convocation, and one of the questions for the day was, **What might we as church need to be let go of, and what do we need to embrace, in order to be made knew?**

This question, and others like it, are at the heart of Diana Butler Bass's new book, CHRISTIANITY AFTER RELIGION. She writes:

> "We live in a time of momentous historical change that is both exhilarating and frightening. Christianity itself is becoming something different from what it was…Ours is a time of awakening…in line with other periodic awakenings in North American history, a time of cultural revitalization and reorientation rather than a time of religious apocalypse."[4]

We began a conversation on her book at Adult Study this morning, and you're invited to join it.

Change always is hard. Who wants to give up something they've come to hold as precious?

Some of you know what it's like to leave a congregation you've loved. What it's like to let go of places and people that once were life giving but became unsustainable. There's a grief that attends such

[3] Learn more about the film and the movement it's inspiring @ http://www.girlrising.com/
[4] p. 31

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changes—for all of us. **But Jesus doesn't leave us in the grief. He leads us toward hope.**

Even as he tells his disciples 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 by 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.[5]**

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

When all hell breaks loose in our world and in our lives. When no stone is left on another. When it feels like life is being dismantled bit by bit, keep your heads up, says Jesus, because something new is also breaking in.

Gloom & doom may be signs of the times, as they have been in each generation since Jesus. But Jesus doesn't preach gloom and doom. He preaches hope.

- **Keep your head up. Don't be afraid. I will give you wisdom. You will endure.**

As we gather at the Table this morning, we'll hear again the words which attend this sacred Meal each week:

ON THE NIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS BETRAYED, JESUS TOOK BREAD & GAVE THANKS…

On the eve of the death he knew was coming, Jesus offers himself—body and soul—to feed his community with gifts of forgiveness, hope and healing—so they in turn will share these gifts and so sustain a weary world…and not only SUSTAIN it, but TRANSFORM it.

The end, you see, is not the end, but a new beginning.

Amen.

[5] John 12:24

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[i] **FACTS ABOUT GIRLS' EDUCATION**
An educated girl can empower herself, lift her family, help her community, change her country.

1 There are 32 million fewer girls than boys in primary school.
Education First: An Initiative of the United Nations Secretary General, 2012.
A girl with an extra year of education can earn 20% more as an adult.
The World Bank, 2011.

2 65 million girls are out of school globally.
EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012.
An educated mother is more than twice as likely to send her children to school.
UNICEF, 2010.

3 There are still 31 million girls of primary school age out of school.
EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012.
10% fewer girls under the age of 17 would become pregnant in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia if they had a primary education. EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012.

4 There are 34 million female adolescents out of school globally.
EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012.
If India enrolled 1% more girls in secondary school, its GDP would rise by $5.5 billion.
CIA World Factbook,Global Campaign for Education, and RESULTS Education Fund.

5 14 million girls under 18 will be married this year. That's 38 thousand today – or 13 girls in the last 30 seconds. UNFPA, 2012
Girls with secondary education are 6 times less likely to be married as children.
International Center for Research on Women, 2006.
1 of 2 11/16/13 3:11 PMWhy Girls' Education | Girl Rising http://www.girlrising.com/what-is-girl-rising/why-girls-education/
If all girls had a secondary education, there would be two-thirds fewer child marriages.
EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012.

6 In a single year, an estimated 150 million girls were victims of sexual violence.
UNIFEM, 2011. **7 And 50 % of sexual assaults in the world victimize girls under the age of 15.** UNFPA, 2005.
Education empowers women to overcome discrimination. Girls and young women who are educated have greater awareness of their rights, and greater confidence and freedom to make decisions that affect their lives, improve their health, and boost their work prospects. Education First: An Initiative of the United Nations Secretary General, 2012.

8 In developing countries, the #1 cause of death for girls 15-19 is childbirth.
World Health Organization, 2012
Child deaths would be cut in half if all women had a secondary education, saving 3 million lives. And all maternal deaths would be reduced by two-thirds if each mother completed primary education. EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012.

9 Two-thirds of the 792 million illiterate adults in the world are female.
EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012
A literate mother has a 50% higher chance that her child will survive past the age of 5.
UNESCO, 2011.

10 There are 9.9 million girls out of school in Nigeria, Pakistan, and Ethiopia.
World Bank Education Statistics, 2012.
By attaining a secondary education, a Pakistani woman can earn 70 percent what men earn, as opposed to only 51 percent with a primary education.
EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012.