

The Reverend Shelley Ryan
St. Luke's Episcopal Church ~ Anchorage, Kentucky
25th Sunday after Pentecost ~ Year C November 5 & 6, 2016
Luke 20:27-38, II Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. When we declare this memorial Acclamation during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, we are proclaiming our hope and expectation of the fundamental belief that Christ will come again, and it is this affirmation of our faith that gives us the courage to press onward in world and nation filled with division.

The Apostle Paul was adamantly committed to spreading the gospel of good news among a divided people. During his second missionary journey he spent time in Thessalonica, which was the principal station on the great Roman road that connected Rome with the region north of the Aegean Sea. Therefore, the Centre was invaluable for the promulgating of the gospel, as many people; both Jew and Gentile frequented the city for the purposes of trade.

Paul won numerous converts to Christianity - both Jews and Gentiles, and as a result, he encountered opposition. The rising tension resulted in Paul leaving the city for he feared that the newly formed Christian community would face persecution. Though he had planned to return to Thessalonica, illness prevented him from doing so. He sent his colleague Timothy, and upon learning that the Christian community in Thessalonica continued to thrive, Paul wrote the Epistles to Thessalonians. Even in his absence many of the people had become veracious in their faith. However, some of the Christians within the community were a bit too overzealous about Paul's teaching about Christ's return, and so they stopped making and future plans. Others had decided that they would no longer work. What was the point? They believed that Christ's return was imminent.

Paul's second letter substantiates to the Christians the truth they know, but he also clarifies misconceptions about the return of Christ, and the manner in which they should live their lives while waiting for His return. They had work to do, and so do we, for as the Gospel of Matthew reads "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son,¹ but only the Father" Matthew 24:26 (NRSV).

Similarly today, when we acclaim 'Christ will come again' we are enlivened by this truth, which allows us to move forward, even in the midst of trying circumstances. We are decreed to live out and promulgate the gospel – the good news - in a world filled with chaos and uncertainty. Frankly speaking, we don't have the luxury of sitting back and watching the time go by if we truly live in Christ, if we are his disciples. We have work to do. Instead of being concerned about the how and when of Christ's return, our focus ought to be upon the here and now, while living a life that exemplifies the teachings of Christ.

Many years ago in New England, during the time of the Puritans, a major eclipse took place causing the sun to be totally blotted out. The daylight turned to dark and the people were terrified. "The world is going to end. What shall we do?" One insightful man replied "Let us be found doing our duty."

Presbyterian minister Neta Pringle further sums this up by saying "We need to roll up our sleeves and get to work. Knowing that God will triumph and the work of God's people will be vindicated is a powerful motive to work for justice and peace even (and I would say especially) in times of discouragement." "God wants to find us at work for those things that are dear to the heart of God, and our task is to keep on keeping on." (Neta Pringle).

It is no secret to any one that we are experiencing a time of discouragement and unsettledness within our country, and this is perhaps an understatement. In the most recent edition of the ‘Living Church ‘ publication four leading clergy and scholars in the Episcopal Church were interviewed regarding the current political climate. Each of them offered valuable insight pertaining to the current situation. However, I would like to share with you an excerpt from the article highlighting the interview with The Rt. Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton – Bishop of Maryland “The current political season is marked by fear, anger, mistrust and division. The values of the Christian Gospel, however, are characterized by the “fruit of the Spirit” in St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (5:22-23).

The politics of Jesus, no matter what social or economic policies are being espoused or denounced; demand these values undergird both the tone of the political conversation and its proposed outcomes.” In addition, “If our dioceses and churches can put into practice the gospel-infused values of Jesus, then we can show the world another model of political discourse in this divisive season, one based on striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.” (*Living Church* - Oct. 30th 2016).

Christ will come again, but for now, for today, let us honor Him by adhering to His teachings, and by walking in love and charity with our neighbors.

I invite you to bow your heads as we pray for our nation.

For an Election (BCP P. 822)

Almighty God, to whom we must account for all our powers and privileges: Guide the people of the United States (*or of*

this community) in the election of officials and representatives;
that, by faithful administration and wise laws, the rights of
all may be protected and our nation be enabled to fulfill your
purposes; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A prayer for Social Justice (BCP P. 823)

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so
move every human heart [and especially the hearts of the
people of this land], that barriers which divide us may
crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our
divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*