

Friends of ZLC,

There is always so much vying for our attention and captivating our souls these days. The crisp, fall air seems heavier this year as we prepare to trudge through another winter of navigating rising Covid cases and “all the extra” cold weather brings with it. The news continues to sensationalize our fears, making us want to bunker down, hide away, and trust no one. Greed and violence against the innocent run rampant. Opinions continue to fly in the face of facts and statistical evidence. Friend and neighbor go on the defensive, ready to pounce when one’s way of life is challenged or called into question in any way. This makes family gatherings this time of year a bit more challenging too. Also, there are racial tensions, gender disputes, and souls and voices from every people group speaking up and out, calling on the world to pay attention, to act, move, and respond. Thus, we languish, wondering which way we should turn to keep the world from crumbling underfoot.

It’s easy to say all of this is a sign of the times--that present generations are to blame for the state of the world. We say the world is worse off. Less compassionate. Too entitled. More dangerous. More hostile. However, one simply needs to pick up her or his Bible to realize the human state of affairs hasn’t changed all that much. War and terrorist acts of war line the pages of our ancient texts. Friend and neighbor argue, disagree, and kill each other. Greed, abuse, and violence against the innocent--such things have never stopped making their way into the psyche of what it means to be a human being. In addition, racial tensions and gender inequalities proliferate books we hold sacred and true.

None of this is okay; hence, one of the many reasons I continue to give thanks for our sacred Scriptures, especially during this season of Thanksgiving. They show us how, in the midst of it all--all of what it means to suffer, lament, and be human throughout the centuries--there has been and will forever be a God who never leaves us. In the midst of what the world gives to us, there is a God who offers us mercy, forgiveness, love, and grace in a way the world cannot. God takes imperfect people who are determined to bring about their own destruction and makes them leaders, risk takers, justice seekers, caregivers, and prophets. Furthermore, God calls on us to partake in the making of God’s kingdom. God calls on us to demand peace from both God and neighbor. God in Christ Jesus teaches us to not give in or give up.

If there is one theme that runs throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, it’s God Immanuel (God with us) even before God came to us in the flesh. So many of our ancient stories resonate and run parallel to our lives today. This is intentional. This is God’s Word inspired, alive, and active in our lives. Some stories even cause us to question God’s presence. We question God’s actions and many times, God’s character. Yet, how closely can we relate to asking alongside the Israelites, “How long, O Lord” must we wait for relief from pain, suffering, and despair?

It’s okay to want relief--to demand relief from God. God expects this of us, in turn prompting us to participate in enacting God’s peace alongside God. And as we participate and wait for that day when the world will be turned upside down, we continue to stand steady and assured that God’s mercy can and WILL overcome all obstacles. Thus says the LORD our God in Joshua 1:9, “Be strong and courageous, do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Peace to you, my siblings in Christ, not fully as the world gives but as only God can give. I pray your preparations for the holiday season are filled with signs of God’s spirit working through you this season!

Your Sister-Servant,
Pastor Stacey