

Pentecost 26, Year C, Proper 28, 111713
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of the one God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Amen.

From time to time, I get a catalog in the mail that sells t-shirts, banners, decals and bumper stickers, all most all of which have on them some kind of saying or slogan that appeals to my sense of humor or my sense of how things work in the world. One that I like in particular, for instance, says, "Well-behaved women rarely make history." Another one says, "Forget world peace; visualize using your turn signal!"

I really like that one because visualizing world peace is really big stuff - too much, too hard, and too unlikely to contemplate. But I can visualize (and really accomplish) using my turn signal - a relatively small thing that makes life a little easier for everybody. You know, if everyone in Mobile and Alabama and the 'south' and the country, etc, etc, used their turn signals and used them correctly, it might be a real start toward 'World Peace'. I know it would certainly reduce my blood pressure and change my mood on my way to work and back every day!

In the Gospel reading for today, Jesus is in Jerusalem in the ominous days before his crucifixion. The Palm Sunday parade has already happened, and by now the shouts of Hosanna have morphed into questions and threats and challenges to his authority. The table has not yet been set for the Passover feast. It is clear in the Temple that Jesus is not welcomed there.

After Jesus calls attention to another unlikely guest of the Temple, a poor widow who gives all she has out of her poverty, the discussion turns to the Temple itself. Some of the people around him look up and speak in awe of the beauty of this great structure, which is the center of the Jewish world.

The Temple complex was, indeed, stunning. It was huge. Scholars estimate that the outer court of the Temple could hold 400,000 people and at festival times, there were often crowds almost that large. It was an overwhelming sight, befitting the building that honors the God who alone is God.

It's at this point that I was reminded of the bumper sticker. Jesus says to those gathered with him, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." Don't make such a big deal out of a building. Buildings rise and fall. But when those things happen, we are called to pay attention to more simple things, to pay attention to those things we can do to make things right.

Many people get all excited about that prophecy stuff in the Bible, all these dire predictions of awful things soon to come. Me? I think with the government shutdown, and the war in Iraq, and the falling apart of the ozone layer and global warming and, healthcare debates, and, and, and; we have plenty of things to worry about in the present without fretting over predictions from the Bible.

One of the real problems we have is that all these things are so large and global and unmanageable and we are so small, that our temptation is to throw up our hands in despair and bury our heads in the sand and hope against hope that it all turns out alright.

But it is important to note carefully what Jesus says in today's text: in v. 9, "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified." Verse 14, "So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, for I will give you words and a wisdom." Verse 18, "Not a hair of your head will perish." Verse 19, "By your endurance, you will gain your souls."

We have a tendency to hear bad news, but these texts are really about good news, about the Gospel. Jesus isn't preaching gloom and doom; Jesus is preaching reality. Jesus was not predicting some far off day of ultimate battle; he was talking about the reality of life in Israel, which was an occupied country and had been buffeted about by war during its entire existence.

Jesus' words remind us of our call to a life of endurance, patience and faith in the midst of a world that is often difficult and confusing. We are called to a faith that looks above and beyond our personal circumstances to the promise of God to hold us and keep us safe forever. We must not forget about "World Peace," but we must remember that we move toward world peace in little things, like remembering to use turn signals.

In the book, "Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten," Robert Fulghum tells the story of a medieval stonecutter who was working on a Cathedral. An interested bystander saw the man working day after day, carefully cutting and shaping and polishing one modest sized piece of rock. Finally the watcher said to the cutter, "This stone must be very important. Is it a part of the baptismal font? Is it the base of the pulpit? Is it the front of the altar?"

The cutter got up from his knees, wiped his hands and lead the man around the scaffolding and pointed out a very obscure corner of the building. "It goes there," he said. The onlooker was astounded, "Really, you're working so hard on something nobody will see?" The stonecutter smiled and said, "God will see it. We're not building this cathedral for nobody; we're building it for God."

Our Gospel lesson is a call to faithful living, to endurance, to hanging in through tough times, to having faith in the God who has faith in us. It's about building our life into a house for God. And we move from our individual lives to making our congregation a cathedral, a place for God, a place where God rules in every heart, where Christ's love motivates all actions, where we remember it's about God and not about us.

From there we move into the world, carrying this ministry of cathedral building with us, building networks of connection in the world, networks that share God's love with those who need it most, those stepped on by war, those persecuted by oppression, those rejected by society, those left wounded and bleeding outside on the doorstep of life. And it is our call to do the little things that open the door so that they may come in and be received into the arms of God's love.

Amen.