

Pentecost 25 • November 14, 2010
Luke 21:5-19

Even When

Middle of this week, I participated in retreat for Pastors led by Bishop Riley. One of the first questions we had to explore together was: "What gives you hope?" And though I didn't say this then, after some reflection and another day of watching the workers demolish what had once been our sanctuary, I have to now say that *new construction*. New construction gives me hope. Our construction here, yes, but more deeply, what God is building — that is our hope.

At first reading, today's Gospel is all about the demolition and the end. Wars and insurrections, famine and disease, pollution and contamination. On the surface, our human history and human story is one of death and destruction — a saga of war stories, epidemics, revolution and rebellion. With all this going on around us, it is easy to ignore Jesus telling us that we don't have to be terrified. It is easy to miss the word of hope and new life ... but before we go there, let's go back a bit.

I know we just prayed it together, but let's just go back to our Prayer of the Day where we asked God: ... embrace us with your mercy, that with you as our ruler and guide we may live through what is temporary without losing what is eternal. That is the prayer of a hope-filled people in the middle of transition. Yes, there is a demolition taking place, institutions, traditions, rituals, governments, powers and so on, but there is also new construction taking place. God is doing something new — even as the old is coming down.

Last week, we celebrated the Feast of All the Saints — and that celebration is so much more than somber remembrance of those who have died — **it is a confession of hope and faith** that the new thing God has done when God raised Jesus from the dead is just the beginning of God's new building.

That now in Jesus, God is creating a new people — from out of every tribe and nation out of every place and time and formed them into one in God's son Jesus.

A new family — not based on race, heredity, nation or ethnicity.

A new nation — not with borders, government or economic ideology but a people who have been embraced with God's mercy, filled with God's Holy Spirit transformed by God's gifts of love, mercy and reconciliation.

In baptism, God embraces us with mercy — pulls us out of the cycle of destruction and makes us witnesses to that which endures forever — God and God's love. In baptism, we confess that Jesus is our ruler and our guide — above anything else, we are Jesus' people.

A lot of people, principles and powers claim our allegiance, demand our loyalty.

A lot of people, principles and powers claim to be the force that makes the world go round, the hope of humanity, the best — form of government, the most promising economic system, the most noble religion. But these powers, principles and people as important and eternal as they may seem at any time, Jesus reminds us these to crumble and fall and come to an end.

Jesus tells his disciples to not run after those false Messiahs -- power, money, indulgent spirituality and empty religious practice but to follow him by living and waiting

and working in faith and hope for God and God alone to create a new thing.

We don't like being told to wait for God to answer our prayers and act for us. It seems like doing nothing ... and in a world where we feel everyday that there is really nothing we can do to stem the flood of violence, hunger, poverty, disease, and suffering. In world that involves us in fighting wars, insurrections, environmental degradation that lead to pestilence and famine even without our having done anything, to wait for God to answer, to wait for God to act seems irresponsible. It seems like despair. Waiting for the end ... in some ways wishing for the end.

But remember, how God has acted — leading Israel out of slavery and into promise. Remember how at the right time God sent his son into the world to suffer and die at the hands of the people, principles and powers of this world. Remember how God raised Jesus from the dead, and has now raised him to God's right hand and remember how God has sent his Holy Spirit upon his people so that ruled and guided by our Lord Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit we can endure the temporary without losing the one thing that is eternal — God.

God loves you and for me. Remember our baptisms. Embraced by God's mercy, we are welcomed into the kingdom, ruled and guided by Christ.

Faith in God. Hope for God's future. That's our rest. And, believe it or not, that's our work. Our work, our calling, our daily job — to shine, to tell the good news of God's kingdom in the things we do and say and in how we humbly wait and hope.

If we think about it, prayerfully, faithfully, this construction project of can be a way of seeing what God is doing the world.

Institutions, structures, traditions that have stood for centuries seem like they are being dismantled. Brick by brick, piece by piece, all is being disassembled. And God's people worship and serve provisionally, as a people, too, in transit, a people often still anxious and afraid of what the future holds.

But at the same time, here and there, from time to time we can start see the new construction taking shape. That's what God is calling us to be part of and that's our work -- witnessing to light of Christ, bringing people to life, healing, building and working for the things that last, hoping for the new future promised in the risen Jesus.

Embraced by God's mercy and ruled and guided by Christ, we pray for endurance through the temporary that we may obtain the eternal — That's our hope — even when ... even when ... even when ... Amen.