

Last week was certainly an interesting week to say the least. Presidential elections always bring a little controversy. This year's was a little more controversial than most. Some people were very happy on Wednesday. Some people were sad and even fearful on Wednesday. Some people have very ambivalent feelings. One thing I hope we can agree on is our gratitude for the veterans who through the years wrote a blank check to their country so that the process of electing a president every four years could continue, or in the case of our British and New Zealand veterans we remember, their democratic process could continue. We are grateful for that, however, in our gratitude, we must remember to hold our patriotism in perspective with a view to the Kingdom of God.

It is tricky to preach on the gospel passage today as we honor our veterans because it reminds us of our ultimate loyalty. Some of those who were listening to Jesus as he was teaching in the temple started talking about its beauty. In records from the time, it was reported that travelers could see the sun reflecting off the temple from miles away. It was the first thing you could see when approaching Jerusalem. The foundation stones were larger than some houses. The outer court of the temple could hold about four hundred thousand people.

The beauty of the temple was appropriate because it was considered the house of God. There was, however, a tension over the size and beauty of the temple. Although it was supposed to be built to the glory of God, it was also designed to show the glory of Herod. It was not just a religious symbol. It was also a national symbol. When the Jewish people thought about the temple, they thought about God, Country, and matzo. They didn't have apple pie.

When Jesus heard the conversation about the beauty of the temple, he said, "You see these stones, a day is coming when one stone will not be left on the other. All of it will be destroyed."

Those who controlled the temple opposed Jesus. If they had been faithful to the purpose of the temple, they would have welcomed Jesus and recognized his authority. If Israel was to be faithful to its purpose, the people of Israel would have embraced Jesus as the one who had authority to order their life as God's people. Because the temple authorities opposed Jesus, they opposed the God who was supposed to be honored in the temple. If that was the case, then the destruction of the temple would be one sign of the vindication of Jesus.

Naturally, the disciples wanted to know when all of this was going to take place. What signs should they look for to tell them it was all about to happen? Jesus then warned them not to be led astray by people who would say the end was upon them. People would come and say that they were speaking for him. They would invite them to join insurrections. They would bring news of conflicts and wars. They would even point to signs in the sky and attempt to get the followers of Jesus to follow them.

Here, Jesus was talking about specific events that would take place in their lifetime. There were several attempted insurrections between the resurrection of Jesus and the destruction of the temple. Those who joined those insurrections were quickly killed by the Romans. There were famines and wars. If the followers of Jesus had paid attention to all of these things, they would have failed in their task to carry the message of the Gospel throughout their world.

Although Jesus was speaking of specific events that would take place in the lifetime of his disciples, I think there is an important message for the church today. As I said at the beginning of my sermon today, last week was a very interesting week. My friends on social media seem to be fairly representative of the nation at large. In the days leading up to the election, my screen was filled with people talking about how this would be the most important election in our lifetime. The day after the election, there were those who seemed to suggest the Kingdom of God had arrived, and there were those who seemed to suggest this was a sign that God's wrath had been unleashed on the United States, and maybe even the world. Many of these conflicting posts were from my fellow Christians, some of whom are no longer friends with one another.

I went back to verse nine of our Gospel reading today. "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified." It's not that elections and politics don't matter. They do matter, but if we allow them to distract us from the mission of the church, we will be led astray. If we put our faith in a political system, we will be let down. If we allow ourselves to be divided by political allegiances, we allow ourselves to be coopted by the systems of this world that oppose the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus warned his disciples that these divisions were coming. Parents would betray their children who were disciples of Jesus. People would betray their own friends who were followers of Jesus. Jesus said the most important thing for his disciples would be to remain faithful to him. Even when the whole world turned against the followers of Jesus, if they remained faithful to him, they would be saved.

Although it is important for us to be engaged in the world, it is of highest importance that we remember that our ultimate allegiance is to Jesus. He is the only one who can keep you secure. The people sitting around you are your brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are bound together by our allegiance to him.

One day, all of the nations of the world will be cast down. They have to be, because there will be one Lord, one King over all the earth. When he comes again in power to reign as King, there will be no more wars, because all will serve him. So do not be led astray by those who try to get you to follow an allegiance higher than your allegiance to Jesus. Do not be terrified when you hear rumors of insurrections and of wars. Keep your focus on Jesus, and your part in the mission of his Kingdom. By your endurance of faith in him, you will gain your soul.