

Pentecost 19A / Proper 23

October 14, 2017 / Rev. Ken Wratten at St Luke's

Isaiah 25:1-9

Philippians 4:1-9

Matthew 22:1-14

Are you ready for the party?

My heart breaks as I see the news each night. First the hurricanes in Texas, Florida, and then Puerto Rico; the earthquake in Mexico; the shooting in Las Vegas two weeks ago; and now the devastating fires in Santa Rosa and Napa. My heart keeps breaking into so many pieces that I have lost count.

When so much calamity hits in overlapping waves like that, I am used to hearing about something I haven't heard about this time... the end times; Armageddon. Have any of you heard someone explaining this away as the end times?

Our Bible is very clear to not waste our spiritual energy trying to predict it. Jesus said that only the Father knows when it will happen. I decided a long time ago that more important than worrying about when it will happen, is to be ready whenever it happens.

"Being ready" is what Jesus was telling the church leaders was necessary, through his story of the king inviting everyone to the wedding banquet. The point of his parable was to wear the right garment; to be ready to respond to God's invitation, whenever it happens.

So what is this garment we should be wearing?

In Romans 13:12, Paul says "Let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light... put on the Lord Jesus Christ." In Galatians 3:27, Paul says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

How do we put on the garment of Jesus Christ? What does it mean to clothe ourselves with Christ? When God invites us to the heavenly banquet, the banquet that Isaiah describes as lavish, with rich food and well-aged wines; where death has been swallowed up, and all tears have been wiped away; when we arrive, what are the holy habits we will have taken on, and learned, so they become part of us? What will we ALREADY be wearing?

Paul gives his dear friends in Philippi a summary of the life of faith that he had taught them, the life that Christ-followers are to live into – 'putting on' Christ:

Rejoice in the Lord always; Paul writes from a prison cell in Rome about his sense of joyfulness. His outward circumstances were often difficult, but they do not rule his inner attitude. He describes a life of joy (different from happiness) that is not a matter of mood, but of will. This rejoicing in the Lord carries power to accept hardship as a time to lean on God - in order to feel His strength. (Difficult)

Let your gentleness be known to all; Christ loved being with children, cared deeply about marginalized people, and even forgave the people who put him on the cross. To whom do you owe a spirit of gentleness? (I got good counsel on this.)

Do not worry about anything, but make your requests to God in prayer; Prayer changes things – and it changes us. Prayer opens our spirits to God’s Spirit, and new ideas arise. God-incidents! This week I had been praying how we could help the victims of the fires in Napa. Then I got a text from Rev Ardyss offering to fill up her car with supplies and gifts and notes for delivery to Napa. Now we have a way. (Please read her note in the Parish Post.)

Dedicate your lives to things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. Being Christian is not simply what we call ourselves; not only that we have learned what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’; but being Christian is a call to life with Christ. It is a call to keep moving into deeper relationship with Christ. It is a call to spend time with other Christians, to work through our own challenges with their fellowship, and to help them work through their challenges. “Putting on Christ” is an investment we decide to make, like putting on a P-coat when we know that cold weather is coming, so that we are ready for any foul weather that hits us. Do you feel ready for foul weather?

I have had people approach me when a spouse or child or close friend dies, and they don’t know how to honor that life, or how to say goodbye. But they know they want God involved in it.

I have had couples approach me to get married, or to renew vows from a civil ceremony, not being ‘church goers’, but they know they want God involved.

I have had family and church friends approach me about disagreements, like Paul was describing between Euodia (u-ō’-di-a) and Syntyche (sin’-ti-chē) in Philippi, and he knew that God needed to be involved in resolving it. Do you ask God to ‘be involved’?

We see the cruel acts of terrorism against innocent people, like the shooting in Las Vegas two week ago. God needs to be involved.

We see people abused because of the egocentric authority of rulers. God needs to be involved.

The way God gets involved is by the world seeing God’s love in action through us who “wear Christ” in the way we raise our children, and handle our family relationships, and manage our disagreements, and how we operate our church community, and how we act to make a difference in Hollister and in the world.

Let's commit today, and every day, to clothe ourselves with the garment of Christ; let's help to clothe each other with Christ; to show the world how central our life in Jesus Christ is to our outlook, our attitude, our joy, our generosity and our caring for each other.

Let's take our instruction from Paul; "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen, and the God of peace will be with you." Amen.