Sermon, November 10, 2024
"The Lord of Hosts Is With Us"
25th Sunday after Pentecost
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine

Take a look at the bulletin cover which depicts the woman from the gospel and her two small coins. It also describes how I felt the morning after the election. I felt very old – out of touch with a majority of our nation, small, diminished, easily dismissed, insignificant, need I go on? In last Sunday's sermon, I predicted that half the nation on Wednesday morning would feel like they had received a severe body blow. How precocious I was for once. I felt like a tag team of Bruno Sammartino and Haystack Calhoun (recalling the wrestlers of my boyhood) had slammed me down with all their force. I don't think I'm still off the mat. Hope is barely a glimmer and I wore this stole this morning to remind me of its reality.

Now I don't say all this to elicit your sympathy or even your empathy, only to let you know what words I can muster up today and which ones I can't. I say it also because talking to some of you, friends, family, colleagues, I know I am not alone in these feelings and there are many who feel far worse. While some are still with the "how could this possibly happen?" question, the more important one is "what do we do now?"

First we continue to gather to keep faith and hope alive and continue to support one another. If you notice someone not here who you think might be struggling, give them a call. If you're not feeling bad right now, give a hug to someone who is.

Two - finds words of encouragement that give you hope and avoid those that don't. I am fasting from most news right now. The opening hymn this morning was carefully chosen, "All my hope on God is founded" a reminder of where our ultimate priorities should be placed.

After the sermon, we'll listen to a recorded hymn with the words,

When at last all those who suffer find their comfort, when they hope though even hope seems hopelessness, when we love though hate at times seems all around us, then we know that God still goes that road with us.

The hymn speaks of the plight of the poor and marginalized. Influenced by the early movement of liberation theology, this hymn seeks to name the many ways humanity is oppressed and how God, in Christ, is present with them. So isn't it interesting that out

of over 150 different sets of lessons in our three-year cycle, this Sunday after this election features not one, but two poor and marginalized women. And isn't it even more interesting that after electing a president who has done more to deprive and denigrate the rights of women since Woodrow Wilson opposed the 19th Amendment, our scriptures highlight two women who are great models of faith and hope.

The story of Ruth happens during a very dark time in Israel. Because of a severe famine in the land, Naomi, her husband and two sons decide to sojourn in Moab—a pagan land with foreign gods. So when Naomi's husband dies, what could she feel but that the judgment of God had followed her and added grief to famine? Her two sons take Moabite wives, one named Orpah, the other named Ruth. The sons die childless. Naomi feels the hand of God is against her - a famine, a move to pagan Moab, the death of her husband, the marriage of her sons to foreign wives, and the death of her sons—blow after blow, tragedy upon tragedy. Now what? She hears there is food back in Israel and decides to return and pleads with the Moabite wives to stay in their homeland – "I am cursed – there is no future for you to stay with me – you have only widowhood and childlessness ahead of you with me." And in one of the most beautiful speeches in the Bible, Ruth says,

Entreat me not to leave you or return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God; where you die I will die and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you.

Here we have a picture of God's ideal woman. Faith in God that sees beyond present bitter setbacks. Freedom from the securities and comforts of the world. Courage to venture into the unknown and the strange.

Let's go to the gospel. Jesus is usually at the center of the action or the dialogue. Today Jesus sits and watches the crowd as individuals passed by and put money into the treasury. Then comes the widow –two small copper coins – perhaps gnarled arthritic fingers so she had to get close to the receptacle so she didn't miss – and she shuffles away – in her mind into obscurity – but Jesus the observer praises her because gave out of all she had. Her commitment was not just what she could spare, but her own self. Always what God seeks is not ours, but us. And, like so many of the heroes and heroines of Mark's gospel, is nameless because she represents each of us who have the potential to give of ourselves.

I also took some comfort this week in a poem I printed for Election Day called "Credo" by Daniel Berrigan.

I can only tell you what I believe; I believe:
I cannot be saved by foreign policies.
I cannot be saved by the sexual revolution.
I cannot be saved by the gross national product.
I cannot be saved by nuclear deterrents.
I cannot be saved by aldermen, priests, artists,
plumbers, city planners, social engineers,
nor by the Vatican,
nor by the World Buddhist Association,
nor by Hitler, nor by Joan of Arc,
nor by angels and archangels,
nor by powers and dominions,
I can be saved only by Jesus Christ.

For those of you who didn't live through the 1960s and 70s, Berrigan was an American Jesuit priest, anti-war activist, Christian pacifist, playwright, poet, and author. He was the symbol of the Catholic anti-war and anti-nuclear movements of that time. Yet despite all that activism, he didn't confuse his fidelity to the gospel with his engagement with politics.

So do we become more a church of Berrigan's time, a church of resistance, actively opposing government policies? I leave you with the words of Bishop Brown in his words sent to us on Wednesday:

Given that the president-elect has pledged to make sweeping changes to our government, some are feeling uncertainty, even fear, about what that will mean. The Episcopal Church in Maine will continue to respond to the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the best way we know, which means we'll keep:

- *preserving democracy*
- *separating the institutions of church and state – they're not the same*
- *making sure there's healthcare for all, including mental health services, reproductive healthcare, treatment for addiction, and that LGBTQ adults and kids are safe and respected*
- *caring for creation*
- *caring for the least and lost, including immigrants and asylum seekers*

That's not politics, that's standing for justice based on what we see as biblical values. Other churches may prioritize differently but we can't do their work for them. Back to Bishop Brown:

This election will not keep us from being disciples of Jesus Christ who join with God in the work of peace and justice. God is bigger than today, and bigger than the United States. In Psalm 46 we hear this:

The nations make much ado, and the kingdoms are shaken. The God of Jacob is our stronghold. The mountains tremble in tumult. The Lord of Hosts is with us.

The Lord of Hosts was with Ruth, Jesus was with the poor widow, and may the Lord of Hosts be with us too.