

Daniel 12:1-3

“At that time, Michael the great leader who guards your people will take his stand. It will be a difficult time—nothing like it has ever happened since nations first appeared. But at that time every one of your people who is found written in the scroll will be rescued.² Many of those who sleep in the dusty land¹ will wake up—some to eternal life, others to shame and eternal disgrace. ³ Those skilled in wisdom¹ will shine like the sky. Those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and always. ⁴ But you, Daniel, must keep these words secret! Seal the scroll until the end time! Many will stray far, but knowledge will increase.”

Hebrews 10:19-25

¹⁹ Brothers and sisters, we have confidence that we can enter the holy of holies by means of Jesus' blood, ²⁰ through a new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain, which is his body, ²¹ and we have a great high priest over God's house. ²² Therefore, let's draw near with a genuine heart with the certainty that our faith gives us, since our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water. ²³ Let's hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable. ²⁴ And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. ²⁵ Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.

Mark 13:1-8

As Jesus left the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Teacher, look! What awesome stones and buildings!” ² Jesus responded, “Do you see these enormous buildings? Not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished.” ³ Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives across from the temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will these things happen? What sign will show that all these things are about to come to an end?” ⁵ Jesus said, “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many people will come in my name, saying, ‘I'm the one!’ They will deceive many people. ⁷ When you hear of wars and reports of wars, don't be alarmed. These things must happen, but this isn't the end yet. ⁸ Nations and kingdoms will fight against each other, and there will be earthquakes and famines in all sorts of places. These things are just the beginning of the sufferings associated with the end.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Though Friday and Saturday are supposedly my weekends, I'm one of those pastors who almost never finishes a sermon until Saturday. That's not to say that I don't work on it throughout the week. In a perfect world, after a week of scripture study and research and writing drafts, on Saturday I'm only editing grammar and reformatting content. But as we all witnessed Friday night, the world is far from perfect. Sometimes the events of the week culminate with a Saturday surge into rewriting a sermon, or at least redirecting it. Terror attacks across the city of Paris reminded us of the brokenness of the world, of the influence that sin still exercises on our world. This act of war by the ISIS caliphate took the lives of some 128 civilians. Days before, suicide bombings took the lives of 43 more in Beirut. This act

of hate against our French and Lebanese sisters and brothers leaves many of us in shock, wondering what to do.

I imagine that many of you come here looking for some explanation in a world that doesn't make sense, for some hope in a time that seems rather desperate. In the midst of this quest for comfort or knowledge or just something that inspires stability, we hear the reading from Hebrews tells us "Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other." One of the ways that I know the Holy Spirit is involved in the process of preparing and preaching a sermon is that, sometimes despite us, normal ideas become extraordinarily appropriate. The sermon plan for this entire week was to begin a two part series on the importance and content of worship, to help explain why we gather on Sunday morning and do the things that we do, to offer a sort of liturgy school.

This began as a desire to help contextualize worship, because all too often in the life of the church, we walk through the journeys of the liturgies, from gathering through word and sacrament to sending, from advent and Christmas through lent and Easter all the way to Christ the King, and hardly know what we're doing or why we're doing it. We'll still talk about that that, but at times like this we need more than school or a classroom. We need a community that proclaims the Gospel with words and actions, that lives the light and life of Christ in a world shrouded by darkness and obsessed with death. We need to know not only why we do what we do. We need to know that what we do on Sunday mornings matters.

Hebrews encourages us to not stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near." The reason

we're here in this place, in a sanctuary, singing and praying and reading and preaching, is because we're called to encourage one another in the faith that we share. Hear that clearly. **We** – not just the pastor or just the musician or just the council – but we together are called to encourage one another in the faith that we share. We don't gather for entertainment, though our faith should be a joyful and exciting thing. We don't gather because our parents taught us to, though our traditions have helped shape the faith we come to encourage in one another. We gather together in this time of worship, in this liturgy, to encourage one another in the faith that we share.

That, friends, ought become the plumb line with which we measure the entirety of our worship. That's the intention of our gatherings, to encourage one another in faith as we worship God and as God meets us in the sacraments. Now, of course, we must take care with this idea of

encouragement. We can't simply expect happiness at every turn, as though encouragement were about stroking our ego. Encouragement includes affirmation and reproof. Encouragement includes time for celebration and reflection and lament. Encouragement is any good thing that helps to support us along the way, to help drive us toward God's kingdom.

After a week of violence, we gather with this encouragement in mind, that God shares our tears and mourns the loss of innocent life alongside us, and that in this midst of such sadness, God remains at work. Many portions of the liturgy admit this tension of God's compassionate presence amidst the world's brokenness. For instance, when we sing the Kyrie, we plea for God's mercy in the world. That's what the words *Kyrie eleison* and *Christe eleison* mean. Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. One of the reasons we gather together in this place is because the

church is one of the few places where we may gather and admit our need. Our need for a shoulder to cry on. Our need for some space to lament. Our questions and doubts and confusions and anger and all the areas where we need God's mercy to become active and at work in our lives. We gather to encourage one another that it is entirely appropriate to have such feelings and to admit such needs to God, because on the cross God knows the suffering of abandonment and the pain of death. The church is one of the few places where we can admit such profound need without fearing shame from others, because we all come to admit the depth of that need. Our faith allows us to be honest with our laments and our needs because Jesus took those laments and needs upon himself.

In the midst of our sadness, we also gather for an encouragement in faith and hope. The readings from both Daniel and Mark suggest that times of great suffering will

challenge our faith. Now, hear this clearly: I'm not predicting the end of the world. I am saying that, in the midst of turmoil and tragedy, we need not only permission to admit our suffering, but a hope that those sufferings will one day cease.

That's one of the reasons that the sacrament of holy communion takes central place amidst our gatherings. Known as the Eucharist, which in Greek means thanksgiving, this meal celebrates the profound promise that God always brings life out of death. Always. When it seemed as though death won the final victory over God, instead Jesus rose from the tomb. The only thing that remains in the grave is death. We celebrate this meal of Jesus' body and blood as the medicine of immortality, as the gift of life that secures within us the life force that raised Jesus from the dead. This means that, for those who died in the terror attacks this week and for those who suffer the effects of cancer and

those who struggle with the aging process and for all of us who somehow fear the loss of life, that death will never have the last word. Never. We gather for encouragement around the promise of life, that not even death may separate us from the love of God or purpose of God in the world.

Another source of hope for us in the liturgy is one another. What terrorism tries to do, at it's core, is isolate us, to separate us from one another through the instillation of fear. We gather in the promise that God's perfect love casts out fear, and that we, as signs of God's love, work to foster compassion and justice instead of fear and hate. We gather to remind one another that we're not alone, that Christ is with us and we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. We gather in the presence not just of those present today, but with those across time and space who gathered in the face of adversity. We gather with Dietrich

Bonhoeffer and the students at Finkewalde in the face of fascist oppression, whose death in the face of terror inspired new life within the church. We gather with Martin Luther King Jr and all those who walked as one in the Civil Rights movement against the terrorism of the KKK and the apathy of the white establishment, whose death in the face of terror inspired new life within a culture. We gather with Perpetua and Felicitas, 3rd century women martyrs whose faith stood strong against Roman oppression, whose death in the face of terror inspired new life within the early days of the Christian movement.

We gather because, on our own, on my own, faith seems to frail to meet the needs of such a violent world. But together, where two or three gather and so the presence of God becomes palpable amongst us, the strength of our faith is found. Not in guns or bombs or hate or violence, but in forgiveness and peace through body and blood of the

one who suffered violence on our behalf, Jesus Christ. We gather for the encouragement God gives through the church, through each of us, who can't always believe on our own, but through the work of the Holy Spirit within us and within our friends, may find the strength to hope in the midst of tragedy.

We gather to proclaim a world that is coming where there will be no more violence, no more death, no more tears. We're not there yet, but we gather for a glimpse of that place, of God's kingdom. We gather for a foretaste of that feast of eternity. We gather to remind one another that Christ, who once died, now lives, and so out of the death that we see, we may expect life to come one day. And in the meantime, while the tears remain, we gather to support one another in the love of Christ, with the love of Christ.

Amen.