

Proper 27 – 24 Pentecost – Year C – November 10, 2010 - Homily
Haggai 1:15b-2:9; Psalm 145:1-5, 18-22; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38
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On October 31, 1938, the front page of the New York Times ran this story. “A wave of mass hysteria seized thousands of radio listeners throughout the nation between 8:15 and 9:30 o'clock last night...” Does anyone know what that radio broadcast was and why it caused such mass panic? It was actually a vivid dramatization of H.G. Wells' classic fantasy story, *The War of the Worlds*. According to the *Radio Heard Here* website, “Instead of simply telling the story, the broadcast presented it as a series of newscasts that interrupted ‘regular programming’ to describe a Martian invasion ... beginning in a small town in New Jersey. While the live news format had been used in radio drama before, it had never been done as realistically or for as long without commercial interruption. The episode prompted many listeners to flee their homes and call friends and family for verification.” Can you imagine how quickly mass panic might have spread today now that we have internet, television, and all the social networking media like Facebook, and Twitter?

More recently, as the year 2000 approached there were widespread rumors of mass disruptions to every aspect of our lives. The Y2K scare, as it is now known, was based on the supposition that many computers would fail as their internal clocks clicked over from 1999 to 2000. Pretty much everything was going to come to a standstill according to the Y2K rumormongers, from major public systems like utilities, to basic household items like toasters and television sets. Were you one of the millions who stocked up on batteries or extra water just in case? Were you a little disappointed when nothing happened? It's estimated that the total global cost of fixing the Y2K problem was between three hundred and six hundred billion (with a “b”) dollars. Let's just say that software companies and computer experts had a millennial windfall.

Tonight's reading from Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica is a response to the same kind of hysteria that caused such widespread distress in 1938 and 1999. Messengers purporting to be from Paul or informed of Paul's theology, visited the churches and told them that the Day of the Lord was here. Meaning, that Christ's second coming was at hand. Paul is left with no choice but to respond to the hoax, calming the church, and encouraging everyone to remain steadfast to the Gospel, and our daily disciplines. In so doing, Paul refers to the great cosmic battle between good and evil. Walter Wink has some important advice for us in this respect. Even if fewer and fewer people believe in creatures like Satan or the lawless one, and tend to dismiss such references as unimportant, “What the ancients called ‘spirits’ or ‘demons’ were incarnate in ... skin and bones, ... an empire, or its mercenary armies.” Wink suggests that we look closely at the nation-state, institutions, economic systems, and other entities that exercise power over our lives to determine whether they are working for good or evil in the world. There are many ways to claim godlike status and thereby control or influence others. When we submit to such organizations, or any number of false gods, we have taken our eyes of God in Christ.

The sword of the Spirit that helps us in our discernment and our daily defense against evil is the Word of God, in all its meanings. It's not a coincidence that when we pray the Lord's Prayer we ask for God to “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”. Furthermore, in our Baptismal covenant we promise to persevere in resisting evil. Disbelief, or unbelief, in either God or the powers of evil at work in the world do not make any of those entities any less real. However, disbelief in God does make people more vulnerable to evil influence and spiritual attacks. To that extent, we are

compelled to honor God in Christ by sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed at every opportunity.

The work of evangelism and mission, including our efforts in establishing equality, justice and peace in the world, can seem like a hard slog. It frequently feels like we are working against insurmountable obstacles, with limited resources. Yet here is the assurance of God's faithfulness and God's promise. The victory of God is already won. God's goodness **will** prevail. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the last word in that war. The skirmishes we still experience in this life are also under God's judgment and control. So much for the ultimate end, but what about the daily temptations to get caught up in the anxiety of the age, or in rumors and lies? Church communities are not immune from stress, nor are we inoculated by faith against real or imagined situations that can shake or disturb us. Like many others, the history of this community shows that this is true. Our task today and every day is to be resolute in standing firm in our faith, and the apostolic traditions, including prayer and the reading of Scripture, when we hear rumors intended to frighten and disturb us. Our task is to constantly engage the world and share the Good News while we wait for Christ's second coming. It is not to do nothing, or to hastily run after fads or human-made programs in a vain attempt to remedy whatever situations we may be facing at the time. Remaining faithful in discipleship is a matter of continuing to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, every day. As children of the resurrection, there is no need for us to fear any part of death, including the death of some aspects of our life in community. Every death holds within it the hope and promise of resurrection, especially when death makes room for new life, and growth, according to God's will.

In the second half of tonight's reading from the letter to the church, we discover that gratitude and encouragement in our faith are the antidotes to fear-based hysteria, and rumors that shake or disturb us. There are multitudes of ways in which we practice God's graciousness here. All are worth celebrating, and in all we offer to God our grateful thanks. There are also many encouraging signs of life and growth at Our Saviour. Each is a cause for rejoicing. We cannot allow rumors, gossip or fear mongering to distract us. Above all, we can take comfort solace and strength in our special relationship with the triune God. God the Father has called us to Himself. God the Son, Jesus Christ, loves us beyond our wildest imagining – so much so that He was willing to die that we might have everlasting life. God the Holy Spirit was sent by our Lord Jesus to dwell with us as sanctifier, guide, and the still small voice of truth. The final words of this portion of Paul's letter are a beautiful prayer, one that we are invited to share in again this night. Let us pray. "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort [our] hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word."

Amen.