

November 13, 2022
Pentecost XXIII
The Rev. Anne C Fowler

Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right. Thessalonians 3:13

So, early in the week I thought I would have to preach from the Gospel. *“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.”*

Right? Didn’t it feel that way? That the apocalypse might be at hand? That a red wave might become the Red Sea? That democracy might be hanging in the balance? I had those feelings, I can tell you. My daughter came over for a visit on Monday and said she was in a bad headspace, and I realized that I was too. We were both very anxious about what the election results would look like, and no amount of digging in the garden could allay my fears.

You know, I am agnostic about prayer, or, I should say, the power of prayer. What I do believe is that praying, at the very least, puts us in mind of the people or events we are praying for. And on Wednesday morning I did feel the power of my prayers, joined with, I assume, the prayers of many others. And those prayers—prayers for sanity, for good judgment, and for a peaceful outcome—were answered.

*Let the rivers clap their hands, *and let the hills ring out with joy before the Lord, when he comes to judge the earth. In righteousness shall he judge the world * and the peoples with equity.* So says Psalm 98 One thing I love about the psalms is their expressions of joyfulness and celebration and thanksgiving. I said to Sam last Sunday, “I can just about see those Israelites dancing around clashing cymbals and ringing bells.”

So if we have prayed for a certain outcome, and that outcome happens, we are called to gratitude and thanksgiving. And how many of us remember to pray in thanksgiving if what we desired has come to pass? I’m sure I fall down sometime in this regard, but I’m happy to say that I did not, last Wednesday. I felt like the rivers clapping their hands and the hills ringing out with joy.

My family has various strains of spirituality running through it. I am the oldest of five, and you know what I am. My next brother, I would say, is agnostic, and my middle brother is an ordained non-denominational minister who does not believe in a higher power. For some years he served a congregation whom he described as “lapsed Unitarians.” The next sister belongs to a Christian cult and espouses some very extreme and literal views, including, I fear, a harsh judgmentalism. And the little sister is a lapsed member of the cult who suffers from permanent PTSD from her time there.

Recently my middle brother and I were having some conversation about these divergent strains. He said that he would not want to be judged on his spiritual beliefs and I shouldn't judge my cult sister for hers. And he believed I would not want to be judged on my beliefs.

I told him that I hoped I *would* be judged on my beliefs. I said that people might find some of my beliefs foolish or misguided but would have to understand that I am a faithful and progressive Christian who tries, and fails, and tries again to live up to those beliefs in practice. I don't know who I would be separate from my beliefs,

Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right. One of those beliefs I speak of is that most people want to do what is right, most people are almost always turning toward the light. And one of my confessions in the aftermath of this week's election results is that I did not have enough faith in the people of this beloved country. We voted decisively for the rule of law and adherence to the constitution. I am proud of us, and I give thanks for all the folks who turned toward the light this week.

And I give thanks to you, beloved people of St. Bart's. It is always an honor to be with you and serve you, as we all continue turning toward the light. Alleluia! Amen