

Those of you who have children or have raised children will recall the many times they, while you all were on a road trip someplace, asked, “Are we there yet?” Children get impatient. They want to know when the car ride is going to come to an end, when they will be able to get out and do what they want to do?

“Are we there yet?” It’s a question that has been asked throughout history. It’s a question that in some ways is being asked in our second lesson and gospel reading for today.

The Gospel of Luke is known for addressing people who are becoming increasingly disenchanted by the reality that Jesus hasn’t come back. There was in the early church an expectation that Jesus would come back at any time. But as the years went by, and he didn’t show up, some folks became disillusioned, maybe even pondering giving up on faith. And this became a particularly poignant issue when experiences of persecution and trauma visited the faithful, something very real for the audience of the Gospel of Luke

The evidence is quite strong that the Gospel of Luke was written around 85 A.C.E., 15 years after the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. So when Luke has Jesus mention that the “days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down” he really is not entering into prediction, but rather reflection on something that has already occurred. The temple *was* torn down. There *were* wars and insurrections. The faithful *were* arrested and persecuted. For many, all of this negativity must mean that the end is near. When the world is falling apart people think that the end has come. But Luke is saying that the end isn’t here yet. Listen to what Jesus says: “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. It isn’t the end. We are not there yet. We’re in it for the long haul.

Our second reading for today from Second Thessalonians suggests some of the same thing. In this reading, we hear about people who aren’t doing work and still are eating, folks who “are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work.” Now, this sounds like a critique of welfare

programs, and is often interpreted in this way. But it is not. The author of Thessalonians is likely dealing with some tourist preachers who are overstaying their welcome. They come into the community and proclaim a message like, “the end is near,” or, “what you need we’ve got,” and then sponge off of the people. And while they are there, they are busy, not doing productive work, but the kind of work that unsettles communities. They don’t do real work; they do mischievous work, all in the name of some kind of theology that suggests that the end has come or what life is all about can be experienced in them.

And the writer of Second Thessalonians says, “No.” If you are going to be a part of a community, be about the business of doing good work—work that builds up people, not tears them down. Keep away from the folks who think the end is near and are busy only being busybodies. The end is not here. You’ve got work to do. “Don’t be weary in doing what is right.”

Folks, we are in for the long haul. It’s not over until it’s over. And it’s not over. Sometimes we think it is the end. Sometimes it appears the sky is falling. And sometimes it is. But it ain’t over. “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he,’ and ‘the time is here.’” People will tell you that they have all the answers, that they are the arrived. They will tell you that it’s just one more pill, a few more bucks, a couple more Bible verses, a few more answers, and you will have arrived. And some other folks will scare you to death, inviting you to live in all kinds of fear. They will try to convince you not to work, not to be busy making this world a better place, not to be busy resisting the powers of evil, the powers that tear people apart. They will try to turn you into moochers, mere busybodies, whose work is only a matter of tearing communities apart.

“Do not go after them.” Here’s the deal: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues.” But before you think this is the end, know that there is more yet to occur. You are going to be arrested and persecuted. And then you are going to be handed over to political and religious leaders. There’s more to come. It’s not over. We aren’t there yet! See this, therefore, as an opportunity to testify. See this as a chance to model not fear, hatred, exclusion, but faith, love, compassion, inclusion,

hospitality. See this as an opportunity to be who you are—a community rooted not in the values of the world, but the values of the kingdom of God.

Now know this. As you do this, as you witness in the face of destructive forces, don't think you have to do this on the basis of your own strength, the brilliance of your own words and wisdom. In fact, Jesus says, "Plan in advance not to plan," or more literally, "Make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance." As you live your lives in light of the opposition, it doesn't have to be about defense. Life in the realm of God is not about defensiveness; it is not about proving you are right. It is about living out of the Spirit of God that is within you, the Spirit of love and compassion.

"I," Jesus says, "will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict." If you can get over yourself, the Spirit will often speak through you, and that will often be a much more effective witness. "If you speak with the Spirit's wisdom," William Loader says, "it is an irresistible force." If it's just about you, if it's just about your need to be right, you probably won't get far. A life preoccupied with itself is not an irresistible force. But a life rooted in and guided by the love of Christ that flows through you will have an amazing power. People like Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi demonstrated that kind of power. What they were able to accomplish did not come from defensiveness and even from their personal brilliance, but from something larger than themselves, a love that captured them and lived through them.

I love what William Loader says about Jesus' invitation not to live on the basis on your own words or wisdom: "Let your responses to the hype and horror of accumulating disasters not be determined by the one-liners of media editors or religious demagogues, but the Spirit who now is the center of your life."

This past week I had a conversation with a woman who obviously viewed the election results differently than I did. Yet I appreciated the conversation. I was honest in telling her what I thought. Instead of being defensive, she shook her head with some degree of understanding, received my thoughts, and then in a very gracious way tried to get me to understand her viewpoint. The conversation was not a matter of one-liners, something that is so prevalent in our world today. It wasn't really about who was right.

Flowing from both of us were insights that, I trust, were not simply a matter of our well-worn opinions or our media-saturated-and-determined minds, but a wisdom that is irresistible, a wisdom that comes from something greater than ourselves, maybe even now the Spirit who is at the center of our lives.

We're living in a tough time. Issues around leadership can be so divisive at the national level, in the local level, in the church. But know this: we are in it for the long haul. The election of a president is neither the end of the world, nor the arrival of a Messiah. It's not over. We're not there yet, which is why we don't want to become people who are living in idleness, being mere busybodies, working only to fracture and tear down. Brothers and sisters: "Do not be weary in doing what is right." "By your endurance you will gain your souls."

Folks, we have lots of work to do, work that has to do with who God is and what God is up to in the world. We have work to do that is about who we are as loved and claimed and named children of God. We have work to do that is focused on the suffering and pain of human beings and the earth. We have work to do that flows from the suffering heart of God experienced most fully in the crucified Jesus. We have work to do because God is kind, gracious, forgiving, and merciful. It isn't over. We are not there yet. So get to work, joining the God who has been at work loving, forgiving, and making new, long before you got your first job.