



May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in Your sight oh Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer.

This past Friday I attended the Veterans Day Commemoration by the gazebo at Memorial Field across the street here in Needham. Hundreds of people gathered there; local luminaries and ordinary people of all ages came together. You recall that Friday was another one of the unseasonably warm and pleasant days we have been having. The weather served as a kind of a balm for the gathering, commemorating as it does members of our armed services who have returned from active duty. As we know, veterans often live not only with obvious wounds to the body, but also with hidden wounds to the mind and spirit. This kind of gathering recalls both the worst harm that humans can inflict on one another, but also the highest ideals of camaraderie, courage, sacrifice, and hope for peace.

In a similar way, the contrasts in our Hebrew Bible reading and our Gospel this morning reflect the lived experience of the people of God, times of both destruction and delight, staggering heartbreak and soaring joy, profound despair, and unfettered hope.

Our ancestors in faith, who gathered together our Scriptures, knew about destruction and devastation. And over the long haul, they knew God to be trustworthy and faithful, and to lift up individuals and movements to inspire people to work for justice and mercy.

Isaiah writes to the Israelites who are surveying the ruins of Jerusalem, destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC. The descendants of those who had been carted off by the Babylonians 2 generations before, had returned to join the descendants of those who had been left behind, to begin to rebuild their Temple and their sacred city.

The seeds of hope are scattered among the ruins. These seeds are present in Scripture, even as Scripture also presents us with grim and unsettling pictures, like the one we get in the Gospel today. Yet Jesus still says, amidst it all: Do not be led astray...do not be terrified...I will give you words and wisdom... By your endurance, you will gain your souls.

Part of our call as Christians is to notice and lift up seeds of hope, as we participate in work that nurtures compassion amidst the frayed fabric of our civic life.

I note a couple of places where I found hope this past week.

One was in a story from Cincinnati. As we know, affordable housing is in a crisis in our country. Just in these past few weeks, I have first-hand experience of a homeless person who was sleeping off and on here in town, including on our patio. The pandemic caused already high housing costs to soar even more.

In Cincinnati, the local Redevelopment Authority managed to outbid several institutional investors for the purchase of 194 homes. While not always the case, institutional investors are more likely to be absentee landlords, evict tenants, keep rents high, and allow properties to deteriorate. They also keep buyable houses off the market. Cincinnati decided to invest in these homes, keep renters in them, fix them up, and then, and this is important, start a number of programs designed to help renters learn to save for down payments, repair their credit histories, acquire repairs skills, or friends with repair skills, or learn to save for repairs. A couple of dozen families have signed up for this class. It is a small thing, but



an important seed of hope. Homeownership is perhaps the greatest engine of generational wealth and stable housing is one of the most important bulwarks against poverty.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/11/03/1132358911/mortgage-rates-inflation-real-estate-housing>

The second sign of hope amidst the rubble comes from Ukraine. I heard a story on National Public Radio about babies being born in that war zone. According to statistics, 15,000 babies were born in Ukraine in the first 2 months of the war alone. Women gave birth in shelters and basements and in hospitals under attack. I imagine the experience of giving birth to be harrowing enough. But amidst the explosions of shells, power outages, lack of water, medical supplies, trained medical personnel, after your home has been destroyed, being on the operating table for C-section when the hospital comes under attack... this I cannot imagine.

The story focused on three couples. Among the interviews, there were some macabre jokes. One mother told the reporter that "there are similarities between living with a newborn and living in a war - like how everything is in the present tense." There was gratitude for the fact that, since there was no work, they could spend more time with the baby. They were able to play games by candlelight. And they're wanting to slow down time, to revel in every moment, even though they also want to speed up time to when there is no more war ~ to when the power is back on, and candles are not necessary.

One of the fathers says he has been amazed by his brain's ability to normalize fear - to allow him to feel extreme joy and extreme sadness at the same time.

And another father says: "This baby is our little victory. And I am a happy father."

And his wife pipes up to say, "And even despite everything," she says, "I, too, am a happy mother."

<https://www.npr.org/2022/11/11/1136166827/ukrainians-are-raising-the-countrys-next-generation-children-now-as-old-as-the-w>

Here again what Isaiah says:

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;

the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind. ...

I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;

no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress...

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat...

The Seeds of Hope

November 13, 2022: The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment, Rector

Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA



They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;

for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD~
and their descendants as well...

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent~ its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Amen.