



Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost || November 17, 2024 || 9:30 am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Proper 28B || Daniel 12:1-3; Psalm 16; **Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25; Mark 13:1-8**|| The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

Provoking Love and Good Deeds

What an extraordinary weekend we've had. We welcomed hundreds of strangers. We cooked, organized, priced – the best bargains around, and we reaped the benefits of hundreds and hundreds of volunteer hours that were invested in making this year's Christmas Fair the best ever. As my first Christmas Fair and the first Christmas Fair and A Prayer ever, it did not disappoint!

One of the new elements that we tried out was inviting folks to be prayed for and to share what they were carrying in with them, in their heads and hearts, reminding guests that we are a church that takes prayer very seriously (and is currently pretty chuffed with our “prayers answered batting average...” YAY GOD!). We will center and share those prayers next Sunday. Please note between now and then, we have more prayer cards in the Narthex for you to fill out if you'd like them to be included next week.

This Sunday we have a raft of apocalyptic scripture, which is a bit jarring – to talk about the destruction of the temple, wars, famine, earthquakes and imposters claiming to be God's embodiment on earth. The Gospel I just read is rough! I don't want us to miss some of the beautiful and reassuring passages as well as some pretty clear directions embedded in this apocalyptic verbiage.

This Sunday I want to dig into our scripture – they are both deep and disturbing and rich with opportunities for us to understand God's call to us.

Our first shared prayer this morning – our Collect of the Day sets the tone for today's lessons. If you were sleepy, or hadn't yet focused, or mentally arrived, I'll remind us that we prayed that God would grant us the opportunity to hear our scriptures in a way that we would read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, so that we could embrace and hold fast the blessing of being a hopeful people.

In short, this is God's intent for our scripture lessons. That they may draw us closer to God and to one another in the ways intended – in prayer, in community, in times of trouble, in times of grief, in moments of joy, in opportunities for celebration – all of these human endeavors are

better when shared, and that is God's message to us this morning. To be mindful of one another in some specific ways prescribed in scripture. To help call each other to account, when we fall short. To lift each other up when we approach or achieve milestones. To love each other generously and vulnerably, and to look beyond our noses to the strangers we encounter every day with the expectation of seeing the face of God.

The best recruiting tool, and most persuasive argument for why we invest a portion of our valuable time with one another-- is how our worship and shared time allows us to carry ourselves beyond these walls. Success looks like the famous line in *When Harry Met Sally* – if we are so lit up with our love for God, and are embodying even the most difficult lessons taught by Jesus, the way we are in the world – kind, brave, attentive to the lost or the disenfranchised – our constant scanning of the horizon to see who we are missing and who must be included at our tables of decision making and power....when we do that - truly embody Christ's expectations for us, when we lean hard into our mantra to Make Kindness Loud and are joyfully successful - the only response that makes sense from the proverbial next table is, "I'll have what she's having".

We are believers or perhaps sometimes doubters, who look to scriptures and wrestle with them. Today's psalm is an eternal gift – probably among the songs that Jesus sang as a child and as a deeply spiritual, if not peculiar teen and young adult. Psalm 16 is this beautiful prayer of intercession for the sick – traveling through to us from our ancient ancestors. "For you will not abandon me to the grave, or let your holy one see the Pit. You will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore."

If you are ever ill, or facing a diagnosis, or navigating a chronic condition and feel overwhelmed – give Psalm 16 a try. Pray it, say it aloud. Perhaps even memorize or sing it. It is full of hope and has served as an intercessory prayer for more than 2,000 years.

Our reading from Mark is dark, and I believe has been misinterpreted as full of signs of the beginning of the end of the world. I will invite you to consider that what Mark is actually describing is that the Kingdom of God is topsy turvy, not valuing the clothes, stations in life, wealth, inheritance or accumulated treasures. God's kingdom and the approach to the world ordered in the way Jesus described is a challenging transition – like the act of giving birth. Buildings which are not actually to be worshipped themselves can topple, power structures may be upended – birth pangs are designed to ready the body and the world for new joys and possibilities.

And what are we to do in the midst of this tumult? Well, first, I hope it is comforting to be reminded that it is above our spiritual pay grade to declare when and how the returning of

Christ will be experienced. Our job is to act as if – always! To see Christ in one another, to stand against inequity and anything but love of neighbor.

I witnessed that in many forms at our Christmas Fair and A Prayer event. There are one thousand anecdotes that I can offer up from this weekend's fair, but I want to offer one that will stay with me for the rest of my life. We had a guest named Susan who requires an electric wheelchair, and whose care giver knew she would be delighted to shop in the Parish Hall. Sorting out how to have Susan arrive safely for this adventure required four strong men who listened to the care giver and lifted Susan and her incredibly heavy chair up the flights of steps from our driveway to the Parish Hall, where she was wheeled around, greeted by some folks, seen as a big surprise for others, and she seemed to be comfortable throughout.

As this lift happened, what rang through my head was that, as a community, Susan, or Susie as her carer very fondly called her, had provoked St. Andrew's into love and a good deed – a faithful embodiment of our reading from Hebrews. Hebrews challenges us to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together – encouraging one another. Yesterday's encouragement and shared focus of our strong renaissance men was inspiring – if not a little scary!

Yesterday because we were gathered as a community, this group of remarkable gentlemen, who had been working in the kitchen, and serving in a variety of capacities all over our fair, came together in an act of necessary love to do a great deed - thank you for that. Thank you for being in community and being vulnerable enough to be provoked to do good. It is what God is asking of each of us. Be vulnerable. Be provoked. Not in a grumpy way. Be provoked to do good and to love the unknown folks or the unlovable.

It is our spiritual job. This is our earthly sacred commission. Done well, we can help heal a broken world, or at least ease the path of a suffering sibling. It is what God is asking of each of us, to help repair the breach, to love our neighbors, to come to church and to keep giving these hard lessons a try.

Let me re-read the passage from Hebrews, which is our charge going forward:

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Amen+