

**Christ Church, Georgetown**  
**Sunday, November 13, 2016**  
**Sermon, the Rev. Elizabeth Keeler**  
**Proper 28, Luke 21**

Some of you may be familiar with words offered by Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 the evening Martin Luther King was shot. Recalling wisdom of the ancient Greeks, Kennedy appealed for the country to “tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world - tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world.” Friends, it has been not only an exhausting week, it has been an exhausting year and for many there appears no end in sight. No real end to the political turmoil, distrust, and division, no end to ongoing racial misunderstandings and disappointments, no end to local and global acts of inconceivable senseless violence, no end to the waste and disregard we show our precious planet home. How can we possibly begin, once again, the hard work of taming our savageness and working to make gentle the life of this world? We are exhausted, we are overwhelmed. Where do we even start?

My first suggestion is that we begin by actually leaving this world and getting out from under our current reality. Let’s stop our naval gazing and refocus our attention on other vistas, other visions of the world. Humankind, after all, has been overwhelmed by its own muddle making before and we just might learn something by casting our gaze elsewhere as we seek the path ahead.

Listen then to this description of the world Isaiah imagines and, as you do, remember that the prophet wrote in bitterly dark days: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth... no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox.... they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

In the darkest of days, Isaiah boldly proclaims that God is continually creating something new, something good, something right.

Neither the Israelites, nor should we, be in any doubt of God’s plan for the world and how we are called to believe and participate in that future. In times that make ours look like a picnic, Isaiah asserts that there is hope, always hope, and God ceaselessly offers new possibilities even in dire situations. We can imagine dreaming of a better future in the midst of struggles because God offers us the hope and vision for a better world. A world made gentle by our savageness tamed. And when we are unable to come up with that hope ourselves, or dream those bold dreams, or imagine that bright future – we have prophets who proclaim them for us until we find our voice again. If you are numb and speechless, you have come to the right place. This morning Isaiah speaks for those who cannot.

Now what about the world Jesus describes? Without mincing words Jesus offers a brutally realistic prediction of times to come: “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.”

Some of us may find comfort appreciating that Jesus is a realist who doesn’t sugar coat the

kind of savagery humankind is capable of. Again, you have come to the right place if you are numb and speechless. This morning Jesus speaks for those who cannot find words. But despite its language and imagery of destruction, Luke's gospel passage is ultimately grounded in the same hope Isaiah's is. The hope that God remains present in the world, and in our lives, even when things have become so bad that it feels like the world is closing in on us. "I will give you words," promises Jesus, "and not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."

Jesus warns of a world that may sound shockingly familiar, and this world vision is incredibly valuable precisely because we are reminded that God knows what a muddle we can make of things. God is not surprised by our floundering, God predicted it. More importantly, God is in the midst of it. God will never leave our side, not in the destruction of the temple, not in the earthquake, not in our persecution of one another or our warring madness. God goes with us to all of these dark places and reminds us of the hopeful future that is intended, the gentle future that we must help God create.

Ultimately, at some point during our own life's journeys, we are confronted with the reality that the savageness of man is nothing new. It reared its ugly head in the times of the great prophets. The savageness of man was evident on a hill in Calgary two thousand years ago, and again in 1968 when both MLK and Robert Kennedy were assassinated within three months of each other.

Perhaps the savagery of man was plain to you in this election year of 2016. Rest assured the savagery of man is nothing new to God. Yet even in the midst of our confusion and fatigue we muster hope. A hope strengthened by God's promise and vision of a better, brighter world.

And when we lose sight of that hope-filled vision, we turn back to God and remember that we are blessed with a faith that maintains and carries it for us. Brothers and sisters, we can make gentle the life of this world and we must make gentle the life of this world. Have confidence that God is about that very work and decide from this day forward that God's vision will be your true and guiding vision. Amen.