

Philippians 4:4-9
ThanksgivingC
November 20, 2016
Lincoln Street UMC

Nerves in the Winslea household have been rather taught this last week. There have been unusual snaps of angry outburst, shorter reins for patience, unexpected flows of tears. And a deep, deep hunger to crawl inside a warm downy comforter and ignore what's going on in the name of politics and the U.S. government.

I wonder if perhaps we are not alone.

I know the initial shock of the election results has waned. But friends, it's only November 20th - exactly 11 days since we woke to the news that, for many of us, rocked our world.

And even if our preferred candidate won, I believe this state of taught nerves is a bit universal just now.

Because now, while expecting relief from the bombardment of election coverage, we are the recipients of pundits' speculations and media reports that continue to stretch the drama and strain our last nerves.

Driving around in the dark this week, lost on unlit country roads outside Oregon City, I listened to economists predict financial collapse and officials worry over rocky tradition team antics and Republican leaders promise the dismantling of just about every federal program begun since FDR.

And no matter where you sit on the political spectrum, this, friends, is no relief from what ails us. This is no reprieve from the 24 hour news cycle that threatens to overtake our sanity. This is just the media pushing a new form of toxic drug in the name of information.

Fatigue, worry, fear, grief, anxiety - this is what ails us.

We are tired of being pummeled back and forth among Facebook feeds, news headlines, editorial comments and the never ending news cycle.

We worry about how to protect those we love, whether our 401k's can withstand the leadership transition and how to talk with family members this holiday season.

We fear for those who were already on the margins of our society and for whom hate language has found a new bull horn.

We grieve what we grew up believing was true about a nation founded on a fair try for everyone, founded on the recognition that we are better *with* one another rather than against each other.

We are anxious about little nuances from strangers and family that would have gone unnoticed before but now raise insecurities about where we stand with these people and whether we're safe. And we're anxious about things that haven't crossed our minds in months, but all of a sudden have new life in this post-election culture.

It is not continuous. We find spaces to escape the mental loops. But it is a constant thrumming in the background. Pounding like the heart beats we can hear in our own ears.

Friends, I don't know if you're like me, but all of the emotional strain just plain and simply makes me sad. Just makes me sad.

And I suspect that this sadness, this grief over what is, will be with me for a while. Will be dancing around the edges of our lives, and cutting in now and then for a reel around the floor with us, for some time to come.

And so how much more important it is this year to remember to give thanks.

To interrupt that which threatens to overtake us and lift with gratitude the wonders of this life - that are still present, are still many.

“Don't be anxious about anything; rather bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks.” These are the words Paul offers the church in Philippi.

They are not Pollyanna platitudes drummed up by a bored or uninvested church leader. Paul writes these words from jail, under threat of capital punishment by a corrupt and brutal occupying government.

These words come from a place of deep spiritual practice.

“From now on sisters and brothers, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely and all that is worthy of praise. Practice these things.”

Let us not take these words in vain, but rather continue to strive to practice these things - these not so small things of daily life.

And in each of our efforts at gentleness, and prayer, and giving thanks, we will be reminded of what is real.

We will be reminded that every gratitude is a drop of grace and makes a difference in our lives and in the life of the world. That's true. And that's real.

So we will fill our candle with small drops of oil - one by one. So that the world will not get the chance to determine for us on what we base our lives. We will fill our candle with small drops of oil as we give thanks - and remember all that is lovely and worthy of praise.

And this will help the light shine. It will help us speak word of justice when needed, offer a hand of compassion. The light will guide us and encourage us in all our days.

And we will *be* the light.

This will be our practice.

Let it be so, now and through all our days.

Reading of Grace - Mother Teresa

Do not think that love, in order to be genuine, has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired.

How does a lamp burn? Through the continuous input of small drops of oil. . . . My friends, what are these drops of oil in our lamps? They are the small things of daily life: faithfulness, punctuality, small words of kindness, a thought for others, our way of being silent, of looking, of speaking, and of acting. These are the true drops of love . . .

Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.

Gratitude before me,
gratitude behind me,

gratitude to the left of me,
gratitude the right of me,
gratitude above me,
gratitude below me,
gratitude within me,
gratitude all around me. - Angeles Arrien