

“Carrying the Light”
January 25, 2026

Job 2:11-13
Isaiah 9:1-4
Matthew 4:12-23

These are not normal days.

As the rich and powerful met in Switzerland this past week, we saw the further unraveling—*shredding*—of the post-war global order that, with all its problems, has made the world more peaceful, less violent, and healthier than any time in history—an unraveling brought on by the words and actions of our President. An armada is on its ways toward Iran. Venezuela is still in upheaval. Little progress is being made toward ending the Russian invasion of Ukraine and peace in Gaza is still elusive.

The winter storm spreading over half of our nation will be the test of whether or not a now vastly limited government can come to the aid of its citizens in a time of disaster. A new report shows the wealthiest 1% in our country holding about \$55 trillion in assets — roughly equal to the wealth held by the bottom 90% of Americans combined.

As we are learning in our adult education series, immigrants in our own community are worried. In Maine, a masked ICE agent shouts through the door of a home: “We’re going to come back for your whole family.” Minneapolis is under siege by armed and masked government agents, I think more because of anti-Somalian racism in the White House than concern about immigration and apprehending with the “worst of the worst.” Their violence has one message: “Do not get in our way.” Fear is the goal.

And now another Minnesotan is dead—Alex Patti shot five times while he was on the ground. Quickly the administration developed lies about the shooting that were contradicted by video.

These are not normal days, and I just can’t speak as though they are.

So, I will start with the sound of silence that we hear in the Book of Job.

After all the tragedies that befell him, surrounded by death and devastation, Job sits among ashes, unrecognizable to his friends who come to comfort him. While he and his three friends sit on the ground for seven days and seven nights, no one speaks a word to him, for they see that his suffering is very great.

The response to crushing tragedy and suffering? A week of silence.

No speeches. No analysis. No speculation.

All of these will come later.

First, however, there is silence—silence that respects the horror; silence that respects one another. After the killings and the violence and the threats, we need each other, not to take away our pain, not to speak, but to simply share the burden of sorrow, of grief, of fear.

Hear again of the wisdom of silence.

Speech that matters grows out of a deep, respectful silence that searches the mysteries.

We face the mystery that is each human person. Who can really say or fathom what causes a person to succumb to the lies and the hatred that so many spew each day? Who can fathom why some spew such lies and hatred? Who can say why one American would turn on another?

And who can really understand what enables one person to rise up in protest even when that puts their very life in danger?

“No one spoke a word... for suffering was very great.”

We face the mystery that is God. Writing about Job and his friends sitting in silence, the Old Testament scholar Carol Newsom says: “It is God the creator who made us as we are, capable of love and attachment, but also susceptible to disease, accidents, violence. In this sense it is God who gives and takes away, from whom we receive both what we yearn for and what we dread. There is a tendency to want to associate God with only what is good. If one does that, however, then when trouble comes it is easy to feel that one has fallen into a godforsaken place.”ⁱ

“No one spoke a word... for suffering was very great.”

We may want to speak words of pain or confession, words of despair or fear or rage. But first, let us be silent.

In our silence we seek once again the consolation of God in the wake of hatred and tragedy.

I remember watching a television report in the aftermath of another tragedy. It showed a father hugging his daughter as she cried. Over and over he kept telling her: “It’s going to be all right. It’s all right now. It’s going to be all right.”

This is how we long to be embraced.

This is what we long to hear.

This is what I *want* to preach:

to proclaim, even now, that God does not want human suffering,

that God abhors the evil that we see and do even more than we do.

that God will yet forgive the wrong we have done and hopes for the repentance of all people.

These are days when we long for the consolation of God, days when we are both angered and scared by what we see, days when the condition of our nation, our world, the venality of our leaders frightens us.

These are not normal days.

In this suffering, tragedy, and violence, in our silence, we turn again to the Christ who calls us and all people to turn from the sin that is destroying us and our world, the sin that ensnares us. Who like John in the wilderness cries out: “Repent!” Turn in a different direction because you are headed toward destruction. We turn again to the Christ who in mercy offers us the forgiveness that we need in these days.

And what do we hear from Jesus this morning?

Not comfort, not consolation, but a call: “Follow me.”

Not: resist or protest. Not: feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, or welcome the stranger. Not even: sell what you have and give it to the poor.

Nor does Jesus call us to be reverential. He doesn’t call us to “admire him or accept his ideas or even to accept him as our personal savior.”ⁱⁱ

The word we hear is simply, “Come, draw near. Walk along for a while. Go where I go. Watch what I do.”

Follow.

Matthew’s Gospel hints about the places to which our following might lead us.

We follow Jesus to the place of prayer, a place apart from the noise of the world, apart from the demands of our rapid-paced lives. How hard it is to follow to such a place! The chaos of these days is designed to keep us off balance. Our devices are designed to keep us addictively focused on them. But look! Jesus pulls back even as his ministry is beginning. He invites active souls, beleaguered souls, distracted souls to slow down for a time, that we might regain our bearings.

We follow Jesus to places of pain and sorrow. The ministry of Jesus was one of healing the sick, of saying “No” to the powers of destruction—and more importantly, of saying “Yes” to all that gives life. In places of pain and sorrow, healing is brought into our world.

We follow Jesus to people in need of good news. He eats with sinners and outcasts—is there no one that he will not love? He speaks to the poor *and* to the rich a message of the nearness of the reign of God. No person, no group is excluded from the love of God that is drawing near. We will be among them.

We follow Jesus to the cross. The Cross is that place where God is bringing a new creation into being. The cross tells us that God is present in the depths of human suffering. It tells us that God is made known to us in weakness, anguish, and despair as much as in victory and strength.

The cross does not invite us to wallow in suffering. We know weakness, anguish, and despair, but we do not need to seek them out. We follow to the cross and find the wholeness, the life, the salvation that we desire, and we share that with others.

And we follow Jesus to resurrection—yes, to resurrection. When we follow, we move from death to life. Resurrection is not what was done once but what is in the making now. The Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar N.T. Wright put it this way: “When Jesus rose again God’s whole new creation emerged from the tomb, introducing a world full of new potential and

possibility...The resurrection of Jesus doesn't leave us passive, helpless spectators. We find ourselves lifted up, set on our feet, given new breath in our lungs, and commissioned to go and make new creation happen in the world.”ⁱⁱⁱ

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.” We who are followers, then, are also the people who carry that light into a world of shadows today. We carry the light of God to places of pain and sorrow; we carry the light of God to places where hatred and destruction and death—the cross—still loom large; we carry the light of God that is the light of resurrection—new life, new possibility.

Indeed, we may even *be* the light that the world awaits in these days.

“Follow me.” The One who offers this invitation is so compelling that we join with countless other women and men and line up behind him. We follow along as best as we know how. As we do, we discover new ways of walking along with him.

We are not alone. We are not praying or healing or discovering new life on our own. We are not sent out to carry the light by ourselves. We do not suffer on our own—and we are not raised on our own. By the Spirit of God, the risen and living Christ is with us.

We need one another—in silence, in sorrow, in anger, in support. We need one another because these are not normal days.

And so once more, in our sorrow and our despair and our anger we find good news in gathering together. Each day, you seek to make real in the world the peace, the healing, and the comfort of God. Each day, you live out your faith in difficult and challenging situations. Each day, you carry the light into the world. Whether you are a member of this congregation, or a friend, or a first time visitor—this morning you came to worship God with such people. That is the special gift of this day. Know that whoever you are, wherever you are on life’s journey, you are held in the care of this congregation that values the image of God in you and each one of us.

These are not normal days. We live in a dangerous and uncertain world. We are moving through a time of enormous political and economic and technological change. Our uneasiness and uncertainty grows. The powers that would destroy are still strong. There are places where violence and death reigns. There are places of deep shadows that need the light you have.

These are not normal days. I cannot speak as though they are.

Let us, then, listen to and follow the Christ who calls us.

Follow in living and in dying.

Follow to new resurrected life.

Carry the light—for that is our task as those who follow.

ⁱ Carol Newsom, “Job,” *NIB*, pg. 360.

ⁱⁱ *NIB Matthew*, pg. 170.

ⁱⁱⁱ N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian*, pg. 116.