Two sentences from our lessons today have been ringing in my ears this week as I prayed and thought about preaching this morning. *Do not be weary in doing what is right* and *By your endurance you will gain your souls.*

I know many of us feel weary from enduring what has been a polarizing and divisive presidential election. An election in which we have inflicted deep wounds upon one another, giving rise to bitterness and fear and expressions of hatred on both sides. Which makes today’s lessons hard to hear because they bear the dreadful news of God’s judgment—even the psalm, which is a jubilant hymn of praise ends with the dire warning that the Lord will come to judge the earth. With all the judging we have done against one another over the last year, I ask myself what good can come from turning up the volume of anger we already have by adding God’s wrath to the mix? Are we foolish to think that healing and reconciliation can arise from so much blaming and finger-pointing and fear mongering?

In response to my questions, I kept hearing—*By your endurance you will gain your souls.* *Do not be weary in doing what is right.*

This week I listened to an episode of a podcast called *Invisibilia.* This radio show is about the invisible forces that control human behavior like ideas, assumptions, emotions and beliefs.
This past week’s episode looked at situations where someone “flips the script”—they do something opposite of what their natural instinct is and in this way transforms a situation. For instance, when someone is warm to us, we are warm to them; when someone is hostile to us, we are hostile right back. In psychological terms this is called “complimentarity.” In biblical terms it’s called “an eye for an eye.”

But what happens if we “flip the script” and meet hostility with warmth, when we return good for evil? When that happens, psychologists call it “noncomplimentary behavior”—In biblical or faith terms we would have to call that—grace or doing good to and loving your enemies.

The first “flip the script” story they told happened at a backyard dinner party in Washington, DC. Family and friends were gathered around the table at the end of their meal when a young man entered their yard with a gun. He held the gun out and everyone got very quiet. He then turned and pointed the gun directly at the head of one of the guests and demanded money. He kept repeating his demand for money or he would shoot. The problem was . . . while everyone believed his threat no one had any money to give. So everyone started talking to the man with the gun trying to dissuade him. One person tried guilt—what would your mother think if you shot and killed someone. Well, he batted that away with “I don’t have a mother” The man whose head was at the end of the pointed gun began to think this was not going to end very well.
Then, a woman named Christine spoke up and said, “You know, we’re here celebrating. Why don’t you have a glass of wine?” All of a sudden it was like a switch had been flipped. You could feel and see the difference on the man’s face. The man tasted the wine and ate some cheese. Eventually he put his gun in his pocket. He apologized and said he thought he came to the wrong place. The group said they could understand and then they gathered around this man who moments ago was threatening to shoot them and embraced him before he left with his glass of wine out through the gate. Later, they found the glass neatly placed on the sidewalk—not thrown in the alley or discarded, just neatly left on the sidewalk by the gate. Of course, everyone ran into the house and cried with relief and gratitude because it seemed like they had experienced a miracle. But was it a miracle?

According to Professor Chris Hopwood who studies the way people interact with each other and non-complementary behaviors, people naturally mirror each other. So as I said before when someone is warm to us, we are warm to them; when someone is hostile to us, we are hostile in return. Breaking this pattern by being really warm to somebody after they've been incredibly hostile to you—that is non-complementary behavior. And according to Hopwood, it's incredibly hard to do. But people do manage to sometimes to return warmth for hostility and when they do it often completely shakes up a situation—it flips the script of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. We’ve seen it happen in the nonviolence of Ghandi in India, and Martin Luther King Jr in Selma.
When we are able to maintain warmth and integrity in the face of cruelty and violence, it can flip the script. Of course, the greatest example of flipping the script we have is Jesus and his love and forgiveness in the face of betrayal, desertion, mocking and crucifixion. But Jesus flipped the script time and time again in all of his interactions . . . enduring he gained our souls, and he never got weary of doing what is right and good.

*By your endurance you will gain your souls.*  
*Do not be weary in doing what is right.*

This is the discipline of hope, faith, and love that all Christians are called to live by so that we bring in the kingdom and break the patterns and endless cycle of name-calling, pointing fingers, raised voices and fists.

In this time of divisiveness and desire to return hurt for hurt, of course we need faith and love, but especially we need hope, the habitual disposition to keep working toward a difficult good. Hope has been called a supernatural virtue, because it is only by God’s gift that we can continue to follow Jesus, neither giving up in despair nor adjusting to what is good enough.

*Do not be weary in doing what is right.*  
*By your endurance you will gain your souls.*

We can either burn ourselves up with fear and rage, or we can revere, love and trust God so that we can flip the script and return goodness for evil and love for hate.
My hope is that we will eventually find the grace
to see beyond our differences
to a good that is common to all of us.
My hope is that we will heed God’s “no” to our self-destructive passions and behaviors.
God will not permit us to achieve peace without justice,
or happiness and wealth at the expense of the poor,
and so my hope is that we will let God’s word dwell richly in us,
curbing our all too human tendencies toward judging others more harshly than we would ever judge ourselves.

This past week in our Lutheranism 101 class,
we were reminded of Martin Luther’s understanding of
Christian authority is not demonstrated or founded in lording it over others and throwing our weight around,
but in devoting one’s whole life to the painful,
inconvenient, and often humiliating service of others.
We are to bear one another’s weaknesses,
even the weaknesses that gall us.
That, Luther, said is the highest calling of a Christian—
as he pointed always to our crucified savior.

Paul reminds us in his second letter to the Church in Corinth
that we are Christ’s ambassadors
sent to proclaim reconciliation between God and humanity.
We are the new people of God who are,
as John of Patmos reminds us,
made up of every tribe, every language and every nation.

Reconciliation is the only way forward for the church
and, I believe, for the nation and for the world.
We cannot hope to rid ourselves of all the people we don’t like. Twelve million undocumented immigrants, generations of descendants of slaves still smarting from the sting of racism, women steadfastly pushing with their gifts and abilities into what used to be a man’s world, gay, lesbian and transgendered persons seeking justice and legal protection for their families; angry white men who feel that their jobs, their culture and their very country is slipping out of their hands; we are all here to stay. There can be no future for America that does not include us all. Reconciliation is not an option. It is our only hope. We cannot afford to allow any obstacles to deter us from pursuing it. The pursuit of anything less is too horrible to contemplate.

Do not weary of doing what is right. By your endurance you will gain your souls.

We are in a time when so many things are changing. Stone upon precious stone is dismantling before our eyes. Yes, this is threatening. But this is not the last word. Jesus makes it clear in today’s gospel that no personal persecution, no false prophet, or terrifying war can destroy God’s people. Not even death itself can harm us, for we belong to God.

Instead Jesus instructs us to see our suffering and the changes that ravage our security and life as opportunities to witness and testify to the love and grace of our Lord.
Instead of flipping out at each other, flip the script.
We don’t even have to worry about having eloquent words.
No, the Holy Spirit will give us words and wisdom
equal to the task,
equal to breaking the patterns of anger and violence.
Even if we lose our grand edifices
and our life seems turned upside down,
we will still gather around Word and bread and wine and water.
Jesus will still show up,
and we will continue to worship, praise, love, and live.
Indeed, in this edgy place between what was, what is,
and what might yet come,
we can be faithful together for the sake of the world.

Dear friends,
let us go forth into the world to serve God with gladness;
let us be of good courage;
let us hold fast to that which is good;
let us render to no one evil for evil;
let us strengthen the fainthearted;
support the weak;
help the afflicted;
honor all people;
and love and serve God,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.