

I have seen it hundreds of times as I have hiked in the Rockies of Colorado. But each time I see it I am astounded. In the smallest crack in a massive granite boulder a seed will have sprouted and taken root. Almost no soil there at all and yet it is an opportunity for new life to grow. And sometimes if there are enough light and moisture and nutrients that seedling will survive a season and another and another and roots will spread and what might have seemed impossible is growing and flourishing and I see it and I can hardly believe my eyes. A spruce tree growing in the most unlikely spot of all.

Jesus spoke of a rocky time that was coming. “Wars and insurrections, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom, great earthquakes, famines, plagues. He told his disciples: “They will arrest you and persecute you – they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name.”

It sounds like a time to run away and hide but right in the middle of all these rocky words Jesus told his disciples this: “This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none will be able to withstand or contradict.”

As I studied for the sermon this week I was startled by that word, “opportunity.” The being arrested and betrayed and living in a world coming apart Jesus said gave an opportunity to testify.

For the first three hundred years of the Christian faith the environment was mostly a hostile one for Christians. But in every little crevice the word was sown and faith sprouted and spread branches and claimed space in a rocky world.

I grew up on a world where the seeds of Christianity were sown in fields that had been prepared for planting. Most everyone I knew went to church each Sunday – it seemed only a matter of time until all the rocks would be hauled away and everyone would believe. But in the last 50 years the cultivated farm has been turning into a

wilderness. Even ten years ago I had no idea that the Muslim faith would be claiming farm after farm, nation after nation throughout the world. Surveys of Americans these days show that the fastest growing group in America are those who say they have no faith. Even those who belong to this congregation and other congregations are entertaining themselves more often with sports and other activities and gathering to worship God less often and children and grandchildren of longtime members do not follow in their footsteps. All of these changes weary me and worry me. What will happen to faith in Christ? To the Lutheran church, to the Christian Church? But I am guessing that all of these changes are not worrying and wearying Jesus.

An opportunity. That is what Jesus sees – cracks between the boulders where faith just waits to be planted. Jesus will provide the seed, Jesus will take care of the growth. You and I are the ones he equips for planting.

Where might the seed be planted? The house next door to you – in neighbors whom you know. They tell you about their hopes and fears as you talk in the side yard – you hear about their struggles – deaths in the family, children having a tough time, people at work who frustrate them. You already listen. What if in your listening you planted a seed – telling how Jesus loves them and wants to be part of their life? What if you gave an invitation to bring them with you to worship Jesus here? What if you offered to bring that young son or daughter to Sunday school? What if every moment looked like an opportunity for you to testify?

Jesus told his first disciples not to prepare their testimony – to trust that words would be given to them when they were needed. The promise is the same for you – Jesus will supply you with words and deeds that will plant a seed.

One thing we can do is to immerse ourselves in the word of God – gathering to hear that word, opening the scriptures during the week to seek to understand what Christ is teaching, gathering with others in Bible study. You can offer your time to Family Promise or to other ministries the congregation supports. Christ will fill you with a word that no one will be able to refute.

You are living in a time of opportunity. Amen.