

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

November 17, 2024

APOCALYPSE

and fearing the future

by Drew Downs

We associate bad things with the word “apocalypse.” That’s mostly because stories that are apocalyptic tend to involve big, sometimes scary events. But this a lot like anxiety—which is the body’s response of predicting the future and preparing for it.

The word apocalypse means “revealing”. In the church, we say things are apocalyptic when God is revealing a truth. And we sometimes find that scary enough.

As we near the end of our liturgical week next week, our gospel stories take on a revealing, apocalyptic character. Which we may naturally find alarming. We should. But like anxiety, we shouldn’t see that alarm as the important part. It is a sign of something else.

In moments of fear about what is coming, Jesus invites us to remember what we are called to do. To love. To help people know the love of Christ.

ORDINARY TIME

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

What do I do now?

This is a classic question that daily bedevils the person who feels lost or afraid or trapped or wonders what the right thing might be, whatever it is—that sense of wanting to know what one is supposed to do in the moment—is asked of priests in churches, gurus on mountaintops, parents in kitchens all over the world and throughout time and what we are often really asking are two very specific forms of this question:

1. Is there an objective thing for me to do—a way to go or action to take—that can solve my confusion right now?
2. As someone I trust who may have insight on this important dilemma I am having, what can you say that can help me understand what to do right now?

And the proper answer is something like “probably not”. But there are useful approaches that get us closer to it. One of the popular articulations of that is to do “the next right thing.” Which doesn’t tell you what to do, but rightly implies that you do know what is right. And getting hold of what is right helps you understand the way to go in a moment.

I’ll be asking this question and leading us through a short exercise this Sunday at our monthly Rector’s Forum after the 10:00 service. I hope you join us!

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 28B

November 17, 2024

Collect

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 13:1-8

As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs."

ORDINARY TIME

Reflection

After spending two days at the Temple, challenging its economic systems, its leadership, and preaching about a better way for the world, including his vision for a more just and equitable experience for widows whose houses are “devoured” by the scribes, Jesus leads his disciples away from the Temple, to return to Bethany. And when he hears those disciples who witnessed the teaching and preaching talk about how grand and amazing the Temple is and the very sight of it impresses them, Jesus warns them about what is to come. It is a call to caution, yes, but also to understand.

What Jesus warns the disciples about sounds frightening—being conned by false leadership, war-making, earthquakes, and famines. But this is the beginning, and when they are called to keep their heads.

He tells them this when they are seeing the grand promise of the world to control and claim a perfect future. When they look at the Temple and see human achievement, rather than the abuse hiding below the surface. We are to remember that this is the place where scribes devour widows’ houses. And Jesus wants them focused on *that*. Not on how big and pretty the building is. *Why?* we might ask. Because, like the slick-tongued devil who will lead them astray, their vision of the Temple itself threatens their souls. It draws us from the truth.

This reminds me of the story a priest told me once of interviewing with a big, cardinal congregation with a tragic past—a church musician had abused over two hundred people over the previous three decades. When the interviewing priest asked them about this, shocked that they hadn’t brought it up earlier, they sounded strangely neutral. He asked “what if these were your children?” to which several on the search committee said “but his playing was so beautiful!” Like with Jesus, the beauty was never up for debate. The rot within was always the point.

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