

Wrestling With the Apocalypse
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O God our Rock and our Redeemer.

Amen

I. Introduction

Our Gospel reading today invites us to consider how we are to respond to the prospect of Apocalypse. Not a happy thought, perhaps, but certainly one that gets us to sit up and take notice. In considering the conditions of our world - climate change with its here-and-now consequences, feelings of separation and division, conflicts of all sorts, recurring diseases, many have expressed apocalyptic worries. Perhaps the Apocalypse is indeed upon us, or not far off. It certainly seems that, whether it is the Apocalypse to come or the apocalypses all around us, avoidance is not an option. And so we are left to wonder, what to do? How are we to face the apocalypses before us?

II. Deliver Us From Evil

Jesus' depiction of the destruction of Jerusalem stands in that odd place that we often find in the Gospels. That place between history and faith. That place of prophecy that leaves us wondering whether Jesus was predicting the downfall of Jerusalem – as would happen seventy years later – or speaking to something more important. And perhaps in this combination of history and faith (sort of like combining two colors to generate a third) perhaps in this combination we can appreciate that the fall of Jerusalem represents for us not simply a distant historical cataclysm, but also an invitation to reflection and action.

When we reflect on the challenges around us in our time that seem so overwhelming, we quite naturally seek first the miracle of deliverance (a question we ponder as we pray the Lord's Prayer – "deliver us from evil" indeed). Even Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane prayed to be spared the suffering to come. And so we too hope to be spared the pain of the apocalypses that confront us. As Bruce Cockburn puts it, "waiting for a miracle." But

perhaps we are invited to consider that the miracle of deliverance is not coming from out there, but starts in here.

In telling of the destruction to come for Jerusalem, Jesus also spoke of the possibilities for testimony and renewal. Jesus encouraged us to see that the apocalypses we face offer opportunities for us to renew our faith in the living Word. Jesus' apocalyptic prophecy was not just a warning of destruction to come, but came as well with a call to have the courage to trust in Christ. To testify to the miracle of faith that enables us to respond to the apocalypses all around us.

III. Sing a New Song

Our Psalm 98 read today calls for us to sing to the Lord a new song. In the face of the apocalyptical uncertainties and worries of our world – whether these be global or local – in the face of these, are we simply to sing and be merry? There is certainly a temptation to do just that – not much we can do about the world, so might as well enjoy ourselves and have fun. “Pass the chips and turn

up the volume.” And indeed we see around us a materialistic society that dominates our world today, distracting us with the material comforts of glittering homes and gardens, tech toys, fashion, and all the rest. An alternative pattern seems to be to retreat into the comfort of simplicity – simplicity of understanding, simplicity of response, simplicity of belief. All in an effort to escape the challenges that confront us all.

But let us ask if escapism is really being true to Jesus’ call for testimony and courage. Perhaps there is another way. For today and every day, singing a new song is our chance to testify as to what our priorities are. Our chance to demonstrate that we are focused not on the comforts that distract us, but rather on our testimonies of faith that empower us. Testimonies that nurture the relationships that infuse our communities and our world.

On the climate change, for example, perhaps the critical question is not how can we prevent or avoid the apocalypse but rather how will we live out our faith as we adapt. When

hearing calls for division and separation, whether Brexit, Wexit, or simply political slogans of “us” and “them,” our challenge is not so much to prevent the “othering” that has characterized human society for millennia, but rather how to set faithful examples of unity and inclusion. In the face of conflict – whether over pipelines, reconciliation with first nations, immigration and housing costs and all the rest - let our faith guide us toward hope and love rather than anger and hatred. Responding to diseases of body and mind – whether super bugs, Ebola or TB around the world or addictions, depression or violent psychoses closer to home – let our response be one of love and compassion. What we cannot prevent or avoid, let us respond with faith. The faith that testifies to the miracle of renewed relationships with God, creation, and each other. To truly sing a new song.

IV. Service and Ministry

Jesus’ call that we consider our response to the apocalypse invites us to apply our faith to the world around us, not distracted by the comforts of materialism or simplicity. We can find inspiration from folks who have

directed their material comforts to service. The new philanthropists from Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, to Michael Audin and Jimmy Pattison, who committed the fruits of their material success to the welfare of others. And we are inspired by those who have devoted the simplicity of their lifestyles to the betterment of the world. Monastics like Thomas Merton who reminded us repeatedly that the contemplative life is not about withdrawal from the world, but about building the strength to serve creation. And so for those of us still in the world, we too can take up the call to further God's Kingdom. To work, to strive - in Bruce Cockburn's words, "like the ones who've cried like the ones who've died to set the angels in us free." Not waiting passively, wishing away the apocalypse of destruction, but welcoming with faithful hope the miracle of renewal.

And in that faith we find the clarity to love each other through service. Emboldened by our faith we are called to work for the wellbeing of all of God's creation. Perhaps, the guidance we heard this morning in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians not to live off the toil of others is just such a

call for engagement, a call for the community of faith to shed the temptations of living apart in favor of a mission of service. A faith commitment to love and serve others. And as we commit ourselves to the mission and ministry of our Church and our Parish, we are called to work together to keep this vessel of ours – the ship of faith, the ship of fools - moving through the storm. Not waiting for others to do the job but jumping in ourselves, to row, row, row.

And what happens when we do? What happens when we respond to the needs of refugees and homeless neighbours by stepping in to help instead of waiting for the system to do so? What happens when we join in with efforts across our communities and our society to safeguard creation against environmental harm, instead of leaving it to others? What happens when we involve ourselves in the Christian education of our young people or our pastoral care for elders and others in need, instead of relying on someone else to do it? What happens when we contribute of our time, talent, and treasure to the wellbeing of our Parish instead of hoping someone else will?

What happens? We are transformed. No longer sitting in the audience watching the play, we climb unto that the stage, into the light, to participate in the action. We are transformed. We are uplifted by the grace and power that God gives us to change the world. And in all of this, we find the miracle of deliverance we have been hoping for. For as we nurture and act upon the faith that is already within us, the new life that is already among us, we see the apocalypse not as an end, but a beginning. Not a source of dread but a cause for hope. We find that just as Jesus promised, the Kingdom of God has indeed come near.

Let us pray: Holy One we wait for your presence, for your love, for your Peace. Grant that we may be strengthened to greet the apocalypses of our lives with faith, impatient for your Kingdom and ready to work for its coming. In Christ's name we pray. *Amen.*