

Sermon for Sunday, November 13, 2022

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

“The World is Always Ending”

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Decorah, Iowa

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Each November, at the end of the church year, the lectionary readings are always about the end times. Surprisingly, when a new church year starts in Advent, we begin again by reflecting on the end.

What do you make of end times talk? How do you hear words like this? Do you feel curious? Concerned? Annoyed? Do you dismiss them as irrelevant? After all, the church has been hearing words like this for over 2000 years and the end still hasn't happened. Or has it?

The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and it felt to Jesus' first followers like the end of their faith, the end of their hope, the end of their life as God's people. The world as they knew it came to an end. Jesus' words about end times, scriptural talk of the end times concern endings that happen over and over: the end of temples, powers, institutions, relationships. Since Jesus's resurrection, it has been the end of the world as we know it, time and again. We've each experienced things falling apart, personally and collectively, in so many ways.

As poet Jan Richardson writes:

“Look, the world
is always ending
somewhere.
Somewhere
the sun has come
crashing down.

Somewhere
it has gone
completely dark.

Somewhere
it has ended
with the gun,
the knife,
the fist.

Somewhere
it has ended
with the slammed door,
the shattered hope.

Somewhere

it has ended
with the utter quiet
that follows the news
from the phone,
the television,
the hospital room.”

God's people experience world-shattering endings all the time, in all sorts of ways. It is these endings that are addressed by Jesus' words today, and by the whole of scripture. Scripture isn't focused on some absolute end of the world. It's much more intent on the future of the world and God's care for it. When scripture speaks about heaven and earth passing away, in the book of Revelation, it speaks of a beautiful future, of God establishing a new heaven and a new earth, and God making a human among mortals.

God has not and will not abandon this world. Rather, God has entered all the endings we face here, experiencing even the ending of God's own life on the cross. God is all in. When things fall apart, God is there sharing in the pain. When our world comes crashing down, God is there raising us from death, over and over and over again. Because God shares in all our endings, because our God raises the dead, we can live with hope. We can share hope with others.

Jesus says that when things are difficult, this gives us the opportunity to testify. We have the chance to be like witnesses in a courtroom, witnesses who make the case that there's something more to be considered, something more at play than may be readily apparent.

God's people are called to testify in the court of public opinion that there's reason for hope even, and especially, when things are falling apart. We are called to testify that the way of Jesus - the way of love, mercy and justice - is good for the whole world. We make this case by how we speak, how we live, how we share our gifts. Our words, our lives, our generosity all provide evidence that God's love is at work, that God's life is stronger than all the powers of this age which seek to diminish and destroy.

Testifying is good for our souls. It gives us the chance to notice, name and nurture signs of God bringing new life. Yet testifying can also feel like a daunting task. So, Jesus promises that we will receive what we need to testify. We will be given words and wisdom. This is what happens when we gather for worship. We are nourished by God's word. We join in the reflection and prayer that opens us to God's wisdom. We are shaped into people who can speak wise, helpful words in the court of public opinion. We are also nurtured by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that Jesus calls our advocate. When we testify in our court, we are not alone. We have a good advocate, good counsel.

And we are given a community that helps us to testify. All the instruction and assurance in this passage is given to a group of people. Each of you in this passage is a plural you. This will give you all an opportunity to testify. I will give you all words and wisdom. By the endurance of all of you, you all will gain your souls. This means we aren't just individual witnesses. We're part of a class action lawsuit against the powers of this world. We are in this together and we have a great cloud of witnesses with us.

Finally, Jesus promises that we will not perish, we will not be overcome by evil, we will be held safe in God. As we testify, we are part of God's witness protection program. Even when we suffer, even if we die, even when we die, we are held always in God and given new life.

All the endings, all the trials of life give us an opportunity to testify. Testifying to the way of Jesus is just what we need to do for our souls. It makes it possible for us to live and speak with hope.