

Proper 28 C 2016

Malachi 4:1-2a

Psalm 98

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Luke 21:5-19

Apocalypse

Is a word we use too often,  
And understand too little.

For some,  
It is tempting to use it now.  
But what would it mean,  
Here and now?  
Not what we think.

Is this apocalypse?  
A shattering of the world  
Like the one in today's gospel?

No – and yet,  
Yes.

That no and yes has little to do with how we regard  
The outcome of this election.

There are those among us  
Who regard the outcome of the election with relief,  
Or satisfaction,  
Who foresee a welcome change.

There are those of us  
Who are appalled, fearful,  
Angry, dismayed,  
Who feel alienated, threatened,  
And helpless.  
Devastated.

Many of us  
Are shaken to our core  
By a seismic shift that took us by surprise  
And woke us up to an unexpected world.

We think of apocalypse as destruction,  
And that is what it has come to mean.

But if destruction were what we meant,  
It would be wrong to use the word apocalypse now,  
In response to the election –  
No matter how devastated we are.

So don't talk about destruction.  
There is another way.  
A way for all of us  
Who gather together in this sanctuary in the city,  
Pledged to grow together in God's love  
And together seek the renewal of the world.

All of us together face the apocalypse.  
Can there be any good news in that?

At its roots,  
Apocalypse  
Is the uncovering of what has been hidden,  
The revealing of what was there,  
Unseen but lurking,  
Waiting, perhaps, in plain sight  
If we would only look.

And so this is an apocalyptic moment.  
Now we see what we could have seen,  
Now we see beyond  
What perhaps we even believed we were seeing  
When we thought we were looking deep and hard.  
But now it is revealed for real,  
And there is no hiding any more.

It is the uncovering of a bitter truth,  
The revealing of deep divisions,  
Competing visions,  
Differences that seem irreconcilable.  
Rage and hatred and despair.

This is where we are.  
And it's hell.

So where do we go from here?

First, we lament.  
We cry out,  
We gnash our teeth,  
We weep ourselves into a puddle.

We cry out in the words of the psalms,  
We stare down into the pit of despair.  
We acknowledge how deeply we have failed to know each other,  
To honor and respect each other,  
To call forth the best in each other.

We feel the shame,  
And blame ourselves.  
We wonder what more we could have done,  
What we left undone.

And then, after we lament, we remember.  
We are people of faith.  
Like our sisters and brothers the Jews  
We are a people of memory and hope.  
Like our sisters and brothers the Muslims  
We put our trust in a merciful God.

We are Christians,  
Formed as followers of the one  
Who went to hell  
And came back out,  
Leaving the door open behind him.

How do we, as Christians,  
Respond to the endless invitation  
Of the one who stands at the open door,  
Calling us back into life?

One way to say it is this:  
We respond to the invitation  
When we let our truth, too often hidden,  
Come out into the light.  
We uncover.

The world is waiting,  
says one contemporary paraphrase  
Of scripture,  
The world is waiting  
For the children of God  
To stand up and show who they are.

Or, as today's gospel –  
Called, by the way, the little apocalypse –  
As today's gospel tells it,  
The cataclysm of the moment

Gives us an opportunity to testify.  
To bear witness.  
To stand up and show who we are.

Who are we?  
What shapes us as a people?  
How will we prove ourselves now?

No one knows what will happen next,  
But there is a clear way to begin.

Each statement,  
Each occasion,  
Each action taken in days to come  
Will be an opportunity for us to evaluate  
Based on our identity,  
Our values,  
And our beliefs.

We enter the Christian life through baptism,  
accepting the gift and promise  
of our covenant with God and one another.  
We promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons,  
Loving our neighbors as our own selves.  
And we promise to strive for justice and peace among all people,  
And to respect the dignity of every human being.

This is who we are.  
We cannot know what will happen next,  
In this strange and fearful time,  
What threats may be enacted,  
What shameful names be called,  
But if the worth and dignity of any human being  
Is called into question,  
Then that will give us an opportunity to testify.  
Then we will be called to stand up and show who we are.

We are a people who examine ourselves  
And confess our faults,  
And acknowledge our wrongdoing,  
Every time we gather together.  
We are a people who ask for,  
And receive forgiveness,  
Every time we gather.  
We can trust the experience,  
And know that we are bound together more closely

By truth-telling and reconciliation  
Than we would be by pretending  
To be better or stronger than we are.

We cannot know what will happen next,  
But if there should come a time  
When vengeance takes the place of forgiveness  
Or self-aggrandizement overtakes honesty,  
It will be an opportunity for us to testify.  
Then we will be called to stand up  
And show who we are.

We are a people who value generosity,  
And believe that God's abundance  
Offers more than enough for everyone.

We cannot know what will happen next,  
But if we hear the false fear  
That there is not enough for everyone,  
But only enough for the winners,  
We will testify to the truth,  
That the gifts and the promise are for all.

We are a people whose common life  
Takes shape and meaning  
From scripture, prayer, worship,  
And the works of justice.

Scripture sets us in a story that is bigger than we are,  
A story that shows us people  
At least as fallible and frail as we are,  
Loved into being,  
Freed from slavery,  
Called to be a light to all people.

Scripture gives us a vision and a hope,  
Words of terror and comfort  
And a glimpse of the beauty beyond all words.

If we are told,  
In days to come,  
That all the stories have gone wrong,  
We have a truthful, hope-filled story to tell.

And we have prayer.  
Prayer that opens hearts and minds,

Offers new vision,  
And heals old wounds.

If we are told,  
In days to come,  
That there are no choices,  
That hope is gone,  
We can show that we are a people sustained and inspired  
And empowered  
By prayer.

And we have worship.  
We have a gathering  
Where we offer ourselves  
To the one who gives everything for us,  
We have a time out of time  
When the beyond, the infinite yes,  
Breaks into our limits and renews our world.

We have a community bound together  
By gift and gratitude,  
Shaped by naming God as the source  
From which we come  
And the home to which we return.

If, in days to come,  
The world seems fractured,  
If meaning fades,  
If isolation threatens,  
We can show who we are by returning,  
Again and again,  
To the worshiping community.

That community,  
In receiving the gifts of God,  
Gains strength and courage  
To stand up and show who we are  
In faithful action.

The works of justice  
Are the actions to which we are called,  
The kingdom work of here and now.

We don't know yet what it will be,  
But when the work becomes clear,  
The work of solidarity,

Of marching,  
Of peaceful protest,  
Of truth-telling,  
Of hard listening,  
Of building houses  
And naming injustice  
And teaching children  
And growing gardens  
And protecting the planet,  
Then we will show who we are.

When we meet fear,  
We will offer love.

When we see walls going up,  
We will make a place of welcome.

When we hear bad news,  
We will proclaim the gospel.

There is good news today.  
It's not in the papers  
Or on the screen.  
But there is good news,  
And it goes by a crazy name,  
A name that sounds like destruction  
But really means revealing.

The apocalypse is a scary thing,  
And we did not seek or desire this moment.  
But it is here.

It is a time of revelation.  
A time of truth telling.

The first layers to be uncovered are ugly.  
But once the truth starts coming to light,  
The deeper layers emerge.

And because we know the story,  
We know this:  
The deepest, strongest  
Truth that is revealed  
When all things are uncovered,  
The mystery that has been hiding in plain sight all along,  
The gift that is unveiled,

Is love.

Love is the mystery at the heart of all things.  
It cannot be killed or conquered.

Love is going to win.  
Love already won.  
We just have to let that truth come to light.

So now, or soon,  
Let's stand up and show who we are.