

[Isaiah 65:17-25](#)

[Luke 21:5-19](#)

In today's gospel reading, Jesus talks about the troubles that are to come. Scholars have often thought that this, and its parallel passages in the other gospels, were probably added later, after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in the year 70 CE, with words kind of put in Jesus' mouth.

That may be the case, but in the light of the extreme climate events we are experiencing and the political instability in so many countries, this year I am reading it differently from before. Even if the writers added it to comfort the people they were writing for by letting them know that Jesus spoke to their situation, it still has validity and this year it seems relevant and immediate.

There are three imperatives in this passage – three things that Jesus tells his disciples to do. The first is to beware, the second not to meditate ahead of time what to say and the third is to “possess” or keep our souls in patience.

So let's look at how those three imperatives help us in our situation today. First, to beware. “Beware that you are not lead astray.” Jesus specifically mentions false prophets who say “I am he” or “the time is near”. This seems to be an invitation to use beginner mind as we look at all that is happening in the world around us. Throughout history and throughout the biblical narrative there have been times of great crisis. Jesus says, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.” This is life on Planet Earth. There have also been times of peace and prosperity and great treaties between nations. This also is life on Planet Earth.

Beginner mind means that we stay open to possibilities and do not draw definite conclusions from what is happening. Unlike the pundits on TV we do not need to know exactly what is happening or even speculate on how it will all play out because we know that God is at work. We do not look at the suffering caused by climate change and say this is it, there is no future. We don't know what the future might be. We don't know what God is doing in our midst. Jesus says beware that you are not led astray into deep pessimism and a loss of hope by those who say the end of life on Earth is coming.

I'm going to come back to this point, but now let's look at the second imperative – “make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and wisdom.” The picture given here is of people being brought into court and having to defend themselves, but I want to change that a little. It seems to me that our continued hope and courage in a time of extreme change – our unwillingness to say that it is the end and all is lost, our ability to hold on to the hope given to us in the resurrection, will be a testimony. As the people of the resurrection we will be the ones who have the hope that God is faithful and will not desert God's people.

But we don't spend time and energy worrying about what we will say or what we will do when things get really bad. When it is time to testify the words and the actions will come. In the meantime, we get to live grounded and rooted in the knowledge of God's unconditional love for us as individuals, as the human race and as part of life on this planet in this universe.

Because we are not listening to those who declare that the end of the world is coming, we can continue to grow and deepen our lives in God

and our hope in the redemption of the world. And in so doing, we become the midwives of the new.

On to the third imperative. It is expressed in this translation as “By your endurance you will gain your souls” but an alternative reading is “In your patience possess your souls.” That makes more sense to me. “In your patience possess or keep your souls.” The verb here means to acquire, get, or procure a thing for one's self, to possess – it is also used in to marry a wife. “In your patience marry your souls.”

I think that's what I long to do. I long to be so in touch with my soul, my higher self or whatever you want to call it – the part of me that speaks the same language as God – that I am always serene, always trusting, always hopeful. That I am so surrendered to the Holy Spirit working in and through me that I am confident that no amount of suffering will ever separate me from God's love or make me fear that God has forgotten me.

The word patience comes from Latin and from Old French, meaning the quality of being willing to bear adversities, the calm endurance of misfortune and suffering. It is when we are in touch with our souls that we can bear adversity or misfortune calmly. In our calm serenity whatever is happening, we get to possess our souls. I think we can turn that around and say that as we possess our souls, as we marry our souls so we develop the patience that enables us to have peace in the midst of apparent disaster. Waiting until disaster hits to develop a deep relationship with God and with our own souls is a big mistake. Let us do it now while we can.

I said that I'd come back to the imperative to beware that you are not led astray into deep pessimism and a loss of hope by those who say the end

of life on Earth is coming. The first reading today tells us why we should not be pessimistic, why we can have hope and courage.

God said:

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;

It looks to us like disaster is happening across the world and in the lives of our neighbors, friends and loved ones. But God is about to create something completely new. These words were not given to the people of Israel in a time of prosperity and peace but a time when it seemed that all was lost.

We are the people of the resurrection. We know that the disaster of Good Friday was turned by God's amazing love into the joy of Easter morning. I want to suggest to you that the difficulties Creation is experiencing now as a result of human over-consumption is very similar. In some way that we can't fully understand it was human sin which led ultimately to Jesus' death on the cross and with him, the death of all hope. It is our over-consumption of everything, but most specifically of petro-chemicals, that have led to the massive fires, floods and droughts that we are seeing and to the extinction of birds and animals due to climate change and loss of their habitat.

It is as if Creation is approaching its own Good Friday. We know what happened for the disciples. They just didn't get it. They didn't believe what Jesus was telling them, or they didn't want to believe. And at the end they scattered. This time we get the opportunity to do it differently.

We have the opportunity to be right there with Christ in Creation. We can see what is coming and we can also trust God's promise that God is preparing something new. And the way we get to be midwives of the new, midwives of the new heaven and the new earth, is not to turn away but to do everything we can do to reduce climate change and everything we can do to co-create the new heaven and the new earth.

We understand things better than our forebears did. Climate change is not a punishment from God but a natural result of the ways we have lived, and continue to live. God does not intervene without our invitation, and we are co-creators with God.

So we can hang in there with Christ as we approach the Good Friday of climate change, not listening to the doomsayers but staying true to our call to be followers of Christ and stewards of planet Earth. We can start living into the new by finding ways to make our own lives carbon-neutral or even carbon-negative as we draw down carbon. We can start living into the new by creating the beloved community among ourselves and our wider community.

Then the Good Friday of climate change will give way gently to a new dawn, a new heaven and a new earth. And our children and our children's children will be blessed;

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;

for like the days of a tree shall the days of God's people be,
and God's chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;

for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD--
and their descendants as well.

Before they call God will answer,
while they are yet speaking God will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent-- its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

And all God's people say, Amen!