

## The New Story

[Daniel 12:1-3](#)

[Hebrews 10:11-14 \(15-18\) 19-25](#)

[Mark 13:1-8](#)

I have always been puzzled by the disciple in today's gospel reading. What's the big deal? Hasn't he seen the temple before? Is he admiring the architecture like a tourist might? Or is he just wanting Jesus' attention and doesn't know what to say - "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Or could it be that he (note that I am assuming it was a man) was still thinking that Jesus would be leading an uprising, and he was commenting that the strength and size of the temple would provide a safe base for the insurrection?

Whatever he was talking about, Jesus' answer is chilling, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

You will remember that one of the literary genres found in the Bible is apocalyptic writing. We heard some today and we will over the next few weeks as we reach the end of the church's year – that's next week - and move into Advent when we think about the coming of the Christ –both in Bethlehem and in the promise of a second coming. Apocalypse means revelation, and apocalyptic writings apparently reveal the coming doom and glory of the end times. Sometimes they are accounts of dreams and visions, sometimes straight fiction but they should not be taken in any way literally. When it seems as though the sky is falling, it is helpful to have an account which makes sense of what is happening now in the light of a great cosmic drama.

Our first reading was from the book of Daniel which has some great apocalyptic writing. Most scholars think it was written about 2 centuries before Christ and was alluding to the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He was a capricious ruler whose persecution of Jews led to the Maccabean revolt and the complete destruction of the temple.

A similar event happened in the year 70, when during the First Jewish=Roman war, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, including the temple. We think that the gospel of Mark was written about then, when everything was falling apart and it was important to write down the memories of Jesus so that something might remain for future generations. And the writer provided words of Jesus which would give comfort and hope in a time of great difficulty.

“Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down...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.”

I was disappointed in the agreements coming out of COP26. I was hoping and praying for the great turning – the day that the nations admit that dependence on fossil fuels is killing us and agree to take the bold steps necessary to prevent even worse climate casualties. After COP26, we have movement, we have forward progress but it is not enough. Barring a miracle, or a series of small ones, things are going to get a lot worse.

It seems that today the sky is falling, just as it did for the Jews of Daniel's time and the Jews of the first century, indeed the Jews of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As things seem dark, it is time for us to be writing our own

apocalyptic story – not one which conjures up mythical beasts and wild fantasies – but a story which reveals God at work among the people of God even when the sky is falling. A story which gives us hope. A story which will comfort us late at night when we are living the birth pangs. A story which will carry us forward through the birth canal into the new light.

And fortunately, we have one. We have a great story about God becoming human and walking among us and knowing what it is to be human. We have a great story about how we have become the children of the living God and that even after physical death we will be raised up to participate in the coming reign of the God of justice and of peace.

The writer of Mark used the words of Jesus to tell a story that would bring hope to his readers. Don't worry, he says, Jesus told us that the temple would be destroyed but don't let anyone lead you astray. Hold on to the knowledge of Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews in our second reading today points out that we are not dependent on priests to have a relationship with God; because of Jesus' life and death and resurrection we have direct access – and the writer encourages us, "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

He who has promised is faithful. Yes, even as the sky is falling we hold on to the hope that God is faithful. Even as the Day of the Lord approaches – the day when everything falls away into darkness, death and then the promised new life – even as that day approaches for us as individuals, for us as a civilization – let us hold on to the confession of our hope.

Wait, wait there's more... back to Daniel, and enter the great archangel Michael the protector. We are not alone. As we do everything we can to live lives of integrity and nonviolence which honor all the creatures and plants of the planet, we are supported on every side by The Communion of Saints – that great cloud of witnesses we talked about last week – and by Michael and the hosts of heaven.

This is our story, this is our song, praising our Savior all the day long.

We get to tell the story in new ways. We get to use new language, language that makes sense to us in this day and age. It probably isn't the language of Daniel or of Hebrews or even of Mark. It is the language of God's people living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the climate unravels.

But it is a story of hope. Always a story of hope.

Because we are called to be one in Christ. We are called to a new life, a life which transcends the disasters of this human existence, a life dedicated and surrounded to the living God in whose love we trust and who will never let us down.

Please sing with me in the words of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine  
Oh what a foretaste of glory divine  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God  
Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood  
This is my story , this is my song,  
Praising my Savior all the day long  
This is my story , this is my song,  
Praising my Savior all the day long.

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