

PROPER 28, PENTECOST 23, YEAR C, NOVEMBER 13, 2022

This morning's gospel appears to scream the apocalypse is coming. I don't know about you but when I hear the word apocalypse I think of Marvel movies and interplanetary warfare, or the zombie apocalypse or nuclear destruction or anything that points to the obliteration of life as we know it.

That's the understanding of apocalypse in our culture but that is not what apocalypse means. The Greek word means something different. It's an unveiling. It is a disclosure of something secret and hidden. To experience an apocalypse is to experience fresh insight or an honest disclosure and accurate revelation of the mundane of our everyday experience. It's nothing sensational. It's uncovering something new and different that we hadn't realized before.

The gospel this morning starts with Jesus and the disciples being at the temple and how everyone is dazzled by it. This temple had been reconstructed by Herod the Great and it was an awe-inspiring wonder. The first century historian, Josephus, described it this way; "The temple's retaining walls were composed of stones forty feet long and it occupied a platform twice as large as the Roman Forum and four times as large as the Athenian Acropolis." Herod reportedly used so much gold to cover the outside walls that anyone who gazed at them in bright sunlight risked blinding themselves.

It's no wonder the people fawned over how magnificent it was but Jesus wasn't impressed. Instead, he responded to their admiration with a chilling prediction: "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."

"In other words, even though Jesus and his followers look at the same temple, they do not see the same thing. What the disciples see is an architectural marvel which is also the biggest, boldest, and most unshakeable symbol of God's presence they're capable of imagining. For them, the massive stones of the temple hold religious memory and bolster the people's identity. It offers the faithful a potent symbol of spiritual glory, pride, and worthiness. In short, what takes the followers' breath away as they gaze at the temple is the religious certainty and permanence those glittering stones display to the world."

That's what they see but Jesus sees something totally different. He sees fragility not permanence, loss not glory and most of all change. Where the people saw God residing in the temple Jesus' apocalyptic vision or unveiling is to invite them to look beyond the grandeur of the temple and recognize that God will not be domesticated. The temple is not the epicenter of God's work; God is not bound by mortar and stone. God exceeds every edifice, every institution, every mission statement, every strategic plan, and every symbol human beings create in God's name.

In the second part of the Gospel story, Jesus teaches his disciples what to do and how to live when the walls come tumbling down. Contrary to what our panic-hungry culture so often encourages, Jesus insists on calm strength and truthful testimony in the face of the apocalyptic – the changes.

"Do not be terrified," he says, when the earth shakes, and nations make war, and imposters preach alluring gospels of fear, resentment, and hatred. Don't give in to despair. Don't capitalize on chaos. Don't neglect to bear witness. God is not where people often say God is. God doesn't fear-monger. God doesn't sensationalize. God doesn't thrive on human dread.

So, the truth is Jesus isn't preaching gloom and doom; Jesus is preaching reality. Jesus was not predicting some far-off day of ultimate battle; he was talking about the reality of life in Israel, which was an occupied country and had been buffeted about by war during its entire existence.

Jesus' words remind us of our call to a life of endurance, patience and faith in the midst of a world that is often difficult, confusing, and conflicted. We are called to a faith that looks above and beyond our personal circumstances to the promise of God here and now. Our Gospel lesson is a call to faithful living, to endurance, to hanging in through tough times, to having faith in the God who has faith in us. It's about building our life into a house for God instead of relying on things that eventually disappear.

Basically it comes down to the fact that we are the bearers of God's good news. But more importantly we are the ones to whom God looks to do justice and mercy. We are the bearers of the power and presence of God. The headlines are not signs of the future day, but signs that it is time for you and me to invest in our faith, our faithfulness, to keep living in difficult times with a trust in God in doing God's work.

There is a book called "Man's Search for Meaning", which chronicles the psychiatrist, Victor Frankl's story of survival in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. He was deprived of every freedom that he had enjoyed as a human being. The only freedom left to him was his freedom to choose his attitude toward his situation.

First of all, he realized that he had to forget his whole former life and find meaning in the suffering that he experienced and the death that surrounded him daily. It was a long and arduous journey in discovering in the most horrendous circumstances the importance of moving beyond what he had "no longer" and reach out to what he did have and "not yet" have.

At a critical moment in his journey of survival he discovered that by keeping an image of his wife on his mind through the day-by-day ordeals helped him focus on love which was so important in his search for meaning. He didn't know whether his wife was alive, but he discovered that Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. Love found its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self. This truth became apparent that Love is the ultimate and highest goal to which we can aspire. In fact, the fulfillment of our lives is through love and in love. And the highest love is God.

This is what helped him survive the atrocities of what was happening to him outwardly. He began to develop an intense appreciation of beauty, nature and even art in the midst of bleakness, monotony, cruelty and death.

This whole understanding that he gained in the concentration camp led him to deal with the present and well as the future. Upon his release from the camp he developed the method of psychiatric treatment known as logotherapy. This type of therapy in simple terms is the discovery of meaning in all of life's circumstances. And it is based on what Frankl discovered in his experience of suffering and ultimately in how he was able to survive his life's most difficult time. He learned after his release from the concentration camp that his wife had died in another one. He eventually remarried, a Roman Catholic woman and they respected each other's religious beliefs but what was foremost for both of them was recognizing that hope and love carried them each day.

So when we take a hard look at Jesus' words on the signs of the times we realize they are not about "the last day," but today. When famine, plague, wars, insurrections, earthquakes occur, these are not signs of Christ's imminent coming, but signs that we

need to take Jesus' words more seriously in bringing that hope and love to ourselves and others when things look bleak.

So how can we hope when we look around us at all the bad news? It's about embracing the words of love and forgiveness of Jesus that promises to bring the power that can break through the atrocities we experience. As Victor Frankl discovered the present and future is ultimately God's love which resides in all of us. Let us ask God to give us courage, to trust God in every aspect of our lives, and give us wills to serve God with everything God gives us. Amen.