

Rev. Jane Courtright 'Stones and Angels' Luke 21:5-19
November 17, 2019

Jesus is coming again....SOON!!!

Just look at all the signs: **NATURAL DISASTERS:**

Hurricanes: Katrina, Harvey, Maria and more!

Floods in Somalia, Italy ...in our country alone,
14 million people in the west have been affected!

Earthquakes in Mexico, Afghanistan, Alaska and California.

Drought in our South and west, Spain, India and China.

Raging forest fires in our west.

WARS (or rumors of wars) in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan and more.

STARVATION, Aids, **economic deficit**, drugs,

mass shootings...(including the recent tragedy in Santa Clarita, CA)

False prophets everywhere!

“What other proof do you need that the world is ENDING???!?”

Those were the words of one **sure** woman during a Bible Study some time ago.

This woman was not alone in her beliefs.

Maybe YOU also hear rumors & omens about the end of the world as we know it!

People have expressed similar beliefs at certain times throughout history,

Particularly at times of great crisis or significant numerical dates...

such as when we enter a new century or thousand year period of time.

During the year 1899, people looked forward to the dawning of the 20th century.

Well, MOST people looked forward to it.

There were some people who believed that the wrath of God

would come down at this time because of all the sins of humanity.

Some people so believed this was true that they gave away their money and possessions...to be better prepared for this judgement day.

These people came to be known as **'Earthquake Christians!'**

Nostradamus was a predictor of the future during the middle ages.

His predictions became popular with people involved in the 'New Age

Movement.' I remember a special program about him on TV before the year 2000.

Lots of people became very anxious about Nostradamus' predictions during this time...especially his prediction of a 3rd World War.

A colleague says that her brother was a member of a strange religious group. They believed that in the year 2000 there would be a major earth shift, that our country would split into 3 parts.

So, they worked to complete an underground shelter in Minneapolis that would save **THEM** when this cataclysmic event took place.

In the last few years, more of us have become aware that events in the 'Middle East' are seen as signs of the Day of Judgement or the End of the World...

with interesting & very literal interpretations of scripture.

Specifically, many view the conflict in Israel-Palestine

As foreshadowing of the 2nd Coming of Christ.

They believe that the toppling of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem would bring this about by making room for the building of a 3rd temple.

There are still people who are planning to bomb

the temple mount to hasten the Second Coming!

There are some Evangelical Christians in America who financially support the state of Israel **BECAUSE** they want to hasten the second coming!

So, what kind of predictions do **you** hear? After all, plenty of the kinds of things associated with the End of the World **ARE** happening **today!**

There **ARE** times when it's hard to avoid feeling that our time **IS UP**.

In the Gospel lesson we read a few minutes ago, Jesus knew that events would occur in Jerusalem that would **seem** like the End of the World **had** come.

Jesus and his disciples are sitting on the Mount of Olives...looking out over Jerusalem **and** the shining, white, magnificent stone temple.

Clearly, those disciples are impressed by this work of human hands.

But we can sense the sorrow of Jesus, who with his insight, could foresee the tragedy that would leave the temple with not ONE stone upon another.

Not long before this, Jesus had to warn the disciples of the death that he faced.

Now, he tries to prepare them for problems they will face in the future.

This gospel is written to the early church, a church in shock after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70.

And indeed, the shining stones of the temple **were utterly toppled.**

Roman persecution of the Christians began in earnest.

PETER & PAUL WERE PUT TO DEATH!

So, in this time of turmoil and confusion, the early church is warned, but also encouraged. Jesus is saying, "Such things will happen, but they don't mean that the **END** has come!"***The world is *constantly* ending **and** beginning, And we humans often live in both states *simultaneously!* ***

How many of you have seen the play 'Fiddler on the Roof?' Many of us enjoyed this play either as a actor or audience of a community or high school production! [and we'll get another chance this year in our community!]

You might remember that near the end of the play, the Jewish villagers are ordered off their land. They've lost **EVERYTHING**, and plan to find new homes for themselves...somewhere else in the world.

In the midst of this great sadness and loss, one of the characters turns to the rabbi and says, "With so much violence and sadness, wouldn't this be a **GREAT TIME** for the Messiah to come?" The rabbi answers him, "We'll have to wait for the Messiah **SOMEPLACE ELSE.**"

*The disciples thought it would **surely** be the 'The End of the World' if the temple was destroyed.

***The Romans thought it was the 'End of the World' if Barbarians entered the city.**

*The people of Europe thought **surely** the plague was the 'End of the World.'

***People in America thought that the year 1900 and then the year 2000 would be the 'End of the World.'**

*Many people still believe that events in the 'Middle East' are bringing about the 'End of the World!'

***We've all heard people who believe that the cancers, aids, drug use, violence, wars, natural disasters and other suffering now surely mean that the 'End of the World' is VERY near!**

**BUT JESUS SAYS, “Just because there is violence and sadness,
Don’t expect that the world will end.”
This is but the beginnings of the birth pangs.”**

In other words, these things are like the first contractions of childbirth.
we have to go through the hard stages of labor
before the Kingdom or Realm of God can happen.

The Realm of God: a time when how God meant it to be WILL BE...
when only the **GOOD & CREATIVE** forces of God are at work.

At other times in the Gospels,
Jesus says that the Realm of God is with you.
Or among you. Or within you.

THE REALM OF GOD IS AT HAND!

Theologian Fred Buechner says it well:

“The Realm of God is so close
We can almost reach out our hand and touch it.
It is so close
that sometimes IT almost reaches out
and takes us by the hand.”

Jesus is saying that the Realm of God
is in our midst **NOW** & is about to be **BORN!**

Today’s Gospel sounds as if it is about endings,
But it is really about beginnings.

THE SAME THING REALLY.

Birth is the end of pregnancy,
& the beginning of a new phase of life.

SO IS DEATH.

Life leads to death and death leads to life!

As Bette Midler says in her song, ‘The Rose:’

“...far beneath the bitter snow, lies the seed...
that with the sun’s love, in the spring, becomes a rose.”

All over the world,

You can hear the Realm of God stirring....

IF you stop to listen.

Good things are happening in and through all sorts of people!

*Some are STILL laboring for equal rights for all people...

no matter what their gender, ethnic background,
gender orientation, color, age, or physical or mental challenges.

***Some are ALWAYS trying to end hunger and disease.**

*Some are working HARD to protect God's earth...

the water, rain forests, animals, the very air we breathe!

***Some mentor, some work at food pantries, walk for many causes,
building and rehabbing homes.**

There are so many people doing lots of different things....

many of them sitting right here today!

Through us, God is building a NEW REALM

out of the fear, the confusion, the violence...

out of the toppled stones of the temple.

A wonderful story was shared with me,

a story that captures the *spirit*

of this building of God's realm.

A family, during their trip to Israel-Palestine,

visited the site of the temple in Jerusalem.

That evening, they read together

what Jesus said about the destruction of the temple.

That night, their 7 yr. old daughter had ***an extraordinary*** dream!

She told her family about the dream over breakfast the next day:

"A million tiny, tiny, angels came onto the temple

And started tearing down those giant stones.

I thought the stones would go crashing down & burst into dust.

But the stones didn't fall **ALL the way** down –

they changed into angels themselves...like in mid-air...

thousands of angels.

Those new angels,

They took tiny bits of stone from the temple, tiny specks,

And flew all over the world;

they put a speck of the temple

inside ANYONE who would let them.”

“Was that the end of your dream?” her family asked.

“No, you see, each speck turned into a whole temple,

on the insides of those people – the right size too...

so that it would fit **exactly** on the insides of their hearts.”

Jesus says, “Do not be alarmed.

These things must take place,

But the end is still to come.

This is but the beginnings of the birth pangs.”

THE REALM OF GOD IS AT HAND! ALLELUIA!!! AMEN.