

**May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts
be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer.**

Today's gospel reading from Mark continues our move into that period in the lectionary that focuses on what is referred to as apocalyptic readings—readings that concern cataclysmic change leading eventually to the end of the world. Most clergy I know are not particularly fond of these readings, at least as relates to preparing sermons. We Episcopalians, unlike some of our other Christian brethren, are not known to focus on the end of the world narratives found in Scripture. On our bookshelves you will not likely find the Left Behind series or expect to overhear us talking about the Rapture. Episcopalians by nature are more inclined to focus on the here and now rather than speculate about the conditions that will lead to our Lord's return. However, it should be noted that apocalyptic writings were common in the first century authored by both Jewish and Greek writers. The Book of Revelation, a classic example of apocalyptic literature, dates from the later part of the first century or the first part of the second. Scholars have debated its true meaning and purpose. Some have argued that its predictions refer to the fate of the Roman Empire rather than strictly to Christ's return at the end of days.

Turning now to our gospel reading this morning, Jesus and the disciples are touring the Temple in Jerusalem. The disciples are oohing and aahing over the grandeur of the temple complex. Jesus basically tells them that it will be totally destroyed. One needs to understand just how shocking a prediction that was. As we know, the first temple built by King Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. The second temple was started shortly after the Hebrews returned from captivity in Babylon toward the end of the sixth century B.C.E. Over the centuries, the second temple had been expanded and enhanced several times, most recently by Herod the Great. It was a massive structure and was a symbol of everything the Jews held dear. They believed that God's power resided in the temple and emanated from it. The idea that it would be destroyed was unthinkable. Yet, the unthinkable happened in 70 C.E. The Romans, seeking to end the Jewish uprising that began several years earlier, besieged the city, destroying the temple and killing most of the inhabitants of the city. Israel would never be the same afterwards. The Temple which had been a repository of great wealth was looted and

spoils were later used to fund the construction of the Colosseum in Rome. Many of the remaining inhabitants of Judea were scattered to other places in the Mediterranean world.

What then are we to glean from this gospel story? Was it just a prophecy by Jesus that we now know has come true? How are we some two thousand years later to apply it to our lives today, if at all? In preparing my sermon, after reading the passage from Mark, one thought came into my mind. What does it mean to be disciples of our Lord in *our* turbulent times? Are we facing our own apocalypse? I don't know about you, but I am intensely grateful that the mid-term elections are over. Like most people, I am dismayed with the level of acrimony and the displays of hatred that we have witnessed over these last number of months. I found myself asking the question of why we as a nation are so angry? Why are so many becoming alienated from people who might look different from them or view the world differently than they do? As our Lord's disciples, how are we to act, what are we to do in the face of so much anger and alienation? Do we have a special duty as Christians to offer a different narrative, perhaps as the aphorism says, "to pour oil on troubled water?"

David Garrow, in his biography, that incidentally won a Pulitzer Prize, entitled *Bearing the Cross – Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Leadership Conference*, had this to say:

The great American civil rights leader Martin Luther King preached one of his most moving sermons on the title "Loving your enemies". He was in jail at the time, imprisoned for daring to suggest that American Negroes should have the same civil rights as other Americans. During his lifetime he had received death threat after death threat, he'd been maliciously accused of being a communist, his house had been bombed, and he was jailed over 20 times. Yet in this sermon he said, "hate multiplies hate...in a descending spiral of violence" and is "just as injurious to the person who hates" as to his victim. But "love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend" for it has "creative" and "redemptive" power.

I realize that even here at Trinity we are not all of one mind. Politically, we have different allegiances and views of what needs to be done in our country. Yet, I also know that our call as Christians is to bridge our differences wherever possible. We need to remember that

as the baptized we are all members of one body—the Body of Christ. Jesus often implored his followers to be salt and light to a broken world. As we know, salt in the first century was used to preserve certain foods. We as Christians should work to preserve peace and to be light for others in the face of evil and darkness.

At Transfiguration in Sisters where I spend the majority of my time now, our stewardship theme for this season is “Love God, Love Your Neighbor, Change the World.” No doubt, it simpler to say than to do. Yet, if we *can* love God and love our neighbor, we *will* change the world. And, that is a change that I think most of us can agree is desperately needed right now. There is a story that was reported in the June 1992 issue of the magazine *Bits and Pieces*, entitled “Christ of the Andes”:

High in the Andes mountains is an enormous statue of Christ known as *El Cristo de los Andes* (The Christ of the Andes). It sits right on the border dividing Argentina from Chile and was built to commemorate the resolution of boundary questions that had more than once threatened peaceful relationships between the nations. As long as the statue stands the nations have pledged there will be peace between Argentina and Chile. And so “Christ of the Andes” stands 14,000 feet above sea level, with one hand holding a cross and the other hand held up as though providing a blessing.

Ironically, shortly after the statue was erected as a symbol of mutual peace, controversy and bitterness broke out, as the statue of Christ faced Argentina, and so had its back turned towards Chile. The tension was defused by a Chilean journalist who humorously concluded it was only right that the statue face this way, for “the people of Argentina need more watching over than the Chileans.”

The Christ of the Andes statue reminds us that Christ offers peace and reconciliation to those who are at war with God and to those at war with each other, and that in effect, we are all like the Argentinians, we all need Christ watching over us.

Without question, these are indeed troubling times. Mass killings and violence are becoming our constant companions. In truth, the world has always been a violent and

troubling place filled with apocalypses both small and large. I cannot predict what the future holds for our country. None of us can really. Yet, in such challenging times we as the followers of Jesus need to bear witness to the hope that lives within us. As tempting and as seductive as the arguments we are witnessing today may be, and I certainly understand the challenges that come with them, I believe we are called to rise above them. It is important that we listen to those with whom we may disagree and do our best to become agents of peace and reconciliation. In closing, I would like to share with you one of my very favorite prayers. It is the one attributed to St. Francis, although the prayer was almost certainly not written by him. Whoever did write it left us a true gift. Let us pray.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen*

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