

My Brothers and Sisters, do not weary of doing what is right

In the name of God ...

On September 13 2001, in an appearance on the 700 club Rev Jerry Fallwell blamed the 9/11 terrorist attacks two days earlier on certain groups and organizations he characterized as promoting “an alternative lifestyle” and trying to “secularize America.”

In 2005, Austrian priest Rev Gerhard Wagner wrote in a parish newsletter that Hurricane Katrina resulted from the indescribable amoral conditions of New Orleans.

And of course, groups like the Westboro Baptist Church have attained notoriety for this same line of thinking.

It's not hard to read that kind of interpretation into the words of Jesus if we are looking to blame people for our own difficulties and problems. But is that what Jesus is getting at here? I think not.

The words in our Gospel text this morning are hard to hear. They have bothered people for a long time. Signs like those Jesus speaks of happen in every age - and every age thinks their experience must be the one Jesus is talking about because they can't imagine that it could possibly get any worse.

I can remember back in Elementary school having drills to hide under our desks because the Soviets could drop a nuclear bomb at any moment. What could be worse? The Cold War and the Cuban Missile crisis certainly seemed to fit Jesus' description of the end times. Surely Jesus would be back any day!

But no return- and now children have drills to hide from armed shooters who actually do come into schools to kill innocent kids - so it can get worse - and still no second coming. We are just not able to figure it out. Yet some keep trying and blaming and scapegoating.

Some groups have been so sure they could read the signs of the times and that their particular moment was **IT** that they sold everything quit their jobs and went up on a mountain top to

greet Jesus when he returned only to have to go back to their old lives and try to rebuild.

These words of Jesus belong to a literary genre known as apocalyptic literature. We will read several examples of this type of literature over the next few weeks as we approach and move into Advent.

That's because for the first few hundred years of Christianity Advent started this weekend and lasted for forty days - just like Lent does. It was shortened to four weeks by Pope Gregory I in the 8th Century.

Although the calendar was changed the readings were not. So we still find readings about Jesus' second coming - a very Advent theme - beginning today.

In fact, Celtic Christians and Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate Advent beginning on November 15th.

But what is this apocalyptic literature and how should we read it. Well what it is NOT is a road map for future events. We are not to see this as a description of events that will happen. Like the whole book of Revelation and Daniel - these unsettling and sometimes frightening images are meant to assure the reader that even in the worst of times we can trust that God holds the future and we do not need to fear or despair.

So with that in mind as we look at Jesus' words to us today we can see the dreadful images that must have shaken the disciples to their core. Here he goes again! Like his descriptions of his upcoming death - the disciples are once again challenged to live and follow Jesus through a frightening and uncertain future.

Here they sit in one of the most beautiful buildings ever built by human hands - magnificent and grand - the heart of their faith - and Jesus tells them it is going to be torn down and demolished - nothing will remain. Then there will be wars and famines and earthquakes and they will be persecuted!!!

Imagine how they must have felt!!

And imagine how the first readers of Luke felt when they heard these words. Luke wrote sometime after 75AD according to most scripture scholars. By then the temple has been torn down by the Romans and many many Jews had died when the emperor grew weary of the constant Insurrections. Jews had been dispersed -even sold into slavery all over the empire and many Jews had died on the hilltop known as Masada where they committed suicide rather than be captured by the advancing Roman army.

If this wasn't time for Jesus to come back when would be? Yet no Jesus.

Jesus tells the disciples of these terrible times to come not to give them a date for his return but to assure them that he will

be with them. That they need not fear or run off to false prophets who will say they know the date and time or who use terrible events to blame and condemn some group they want to scapegoat.

Rather Jesus says these are times to hold on, to step up, to speak your words of love and faith to those who are afraid, lost, and without hope. Jesus even says these are opportunities- times that can bring us closer to God and more alive to God's presence.

Jesus is calling his disciples - and that includes you and me- to live in the now - in the present moment. Some call this liminal space - we can think of this as something like a threshold - we

live in the threshold - in the doorway - neither in the past nor in the future.

As Pope Francis told the youth at a worldwide gathering – you are the Now of God. And so are we!

We are called to live in this Now - each moment as it is given to us - with all of this moment's trials and tribulations.

We are not to harken back to a by-gone era that we fantasize was better than this one.

And we are not to wait complacently and idly for some future moment when God will swoop in and make everything right.

We are to live in this moment - in this liminal space of now but not yet. Because God is present in this moment even in the chaos and confusion of our personal lives and the life of the world - no matter how out of control everything may seem.

In fact it is often in the moments when we experience the least control – when things seem most chaotic and disorienting that we have the opportunity for transformation- for truly becoming the person we are created to be

It is in these moments that we can experience self-emptying – letting go of our false sense of power and control and moving into self-surrender to God – **floating in God** as one mystic puts it – dependent not on our own doing but leaning on the grace of God.

And in each Now - we act, we speak up, we proclaim God's truth because these are opportunities to witness to God's amazing love.

Our own efforts, our words and deeds by themselves may seem insignificant – like they don't amount to much, and they, on their own, may not have the power to end racism, may not stop oppression and injustice, may not bring world peace or an end to global warming but in God's economy nothing good is wasted. Every small act of kindness and love are bricks in a building - a kingdom - a world- more magnificent and grand than anything human hands could ever make.

As Contemplative Outreach founder Fr Thomas Keating wrote

it is when "self-made worlds come to an end [that] a new world appears within and all around."

Sometimes I have this thought – call me crazy – that we are looking for Christ in all the wrong places.

Maybe, just maybe, Christ isn't coming back in the midst of some horrible calamity or terrible destruction.

Maybe God is really like that Prodigal Father who is waiting with great love and patience for God's children to come to their senses and live fully in God's presence in this moment.

Maybe, just maybe, Jesus meant it when he said that to save our lives we must lose them in service to others,

maybe just maybe he meant it when he said we are light and salt for the earth,

maybe, just maybe, he was telling us of God's great plan that would come to fulfillment when all God's people – to the ends of the earth – are brought into the love and life of Christ.

In the words of the contemporary songwriter Brian McFarland in his song "Until All Are Fed":

How long will we sing, how long will we pray

How long will we write and send?

How long will we bring, how long will we stay

How long will we make amends?

Until all have bread we cry out

Until all on earth are fed

Like the One who loves us, each and everyone

We serve until all are fed.

Maybe then Christ will come back, and we will see him not in fear and trembling, but when he comes to join us in the feast where all are fed - and all creation will see it together.

So our focus is to be on the here and now. On the people and the need and the pain that is right in front of us. As Paul said in our reading from Thessalonians - brothers and sisters - do not weary of doing what is right.

We are called to live in this moment - and this moment is full of God's presence. We do not need to wait for some distant day when Christ will return. Christ is right here - as close to us as the breath we breathe and the bread we eat. We know the work that is set before us. The hard part is doing it day in and

day out when it can become mundane - and when it seems to be too insignificant to matter.

And we can do this because God has given us the gift of hope - and we have hope because we have the promise of Jesus: "... not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls." May we live in this hope and - as the old hymn says - always standing on the promises of God.

Amen.