

Daniel 12:1-3

Psalm 16

Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

Mark 13:1-8

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Church of St.Martin-in-the-Fields

Year B Proper 28

November 17th, 2024

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen

In case you've missed it, cold water swimming these past few years has been having a moment. Devotees point its health benefits—like lowering one's blood pressure and raising one's mood—that come from regularly plunging into frigid, icy water. "Cold water clearly gives us something we can't find anywhere else," said a fan. Another pointed to gaining an increased sense of mastery in a world that feels like its spinning out of control.

My first glance at the lectionary for Sunday can feel like standing on the shores of an icy lake, knowing that like it or not, I must take the plunge. The odds are that the greater my initial resistance is to a text, the more I'll learn in the end.

But quite frankly, I'm alarmed when I hear of "wars and rumors of wars." And "nations rising up against other nations." No thank you. We've got plenty already and I've had my fill. Throw in earthquakes and famines, sure, why not? And this is just the beginning of the birth pangs? Take the plunge? Really, what's the point?

Today, Psalm 16 promises that God "will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasure for evermore."

Show me. I'm all in. It's hard to find the path right now. Like the disciples, my gaze these days is one dimensional. I can only see what's right before me.

When Jesus comes out of the temple, his disciples want him to be as awestruck as they are by its massive grandeur it's with its walled covered in gold. The disciples see power, safety, and "religious certainty" in the Temple. But here's the catch: that's not what Jesus sees. Writes author Debie Thomas:¹

¹ Thomas, Debie "Journey with Jesus," a Global magazine for the whole world," November 11th, 2018

He sees ruin. Rubble. Destruction. Fragility, not permanence. Loss not glory.
Change not stasis. 'Not one stone will be left here upon the other.'

It feels apocalyptic which is exactly the point and where most of us stop. But an apocalypse can also be an "unveiling" or an "uncovering" and we are asked to see something beyond the destruction that we'd rather not.

A bracing thought, like that icy water.

It is far too soon to say with any certainty what these past 12 days since November 5th really mean. They feel apocalyptic as threats to the Constitution, the rule of law, and plans for mass deportations of millions of undocumented immigrants loom large on the horizon.

"Beware that no one leads you astray," Jesus warns his disciples with quiet confidence. "Many will come in my name and say, I am he and they will lead many astray" which certainly resonates with those who are not the acolytes of an "orange messiah" who demeans some people as "vermin" and "garbage" and refers to others as "poisoning our blood." So much for the "least of these." You'll remember that "whatever you do unto them, you do unto me."

But like empires, temples, fall. What seemed invincible to the disciples was in rubble and ruins some 40 years later in 70 AD. Herod's temple was not crushed by God, but by a Rome emperor in a violent siege of Jerusalem that left thousands dead as the city was burned to the ground.

A temple obliterated over 2 thousand years ago becomes relevant today if and when we ask ourselves about the temples in our own lives. Writes pastor and author Nadia Bolz-Weber:

What temples am I so reliant upon still standing in my own life? What must remain unchanged in order for me to still feel hopeful... maybe my own able-bodiedness...or the health and safety of my children or the longevity of my relationships. What are my temples that while they stand, I am good and God is good, but if they fall, I have nothing left but despair?²

Our faith is based on the resurrection, on the assuredness that after every Good Friday comes Easter. 135 Easters have been joyfully celebrated in these pews, in this church.

² Weber, Nadia Bolz, "The Corners," "Watching Out for Nonsense," July 15, 2024

World Wars, I and II, Korea, Vietnam, 9/11, the pandemic-- People have kneeled and prayed here in defeated and desperate times and born together what seemed unbearable— and there is no measure of the personal anguish that has been held in these walls the silent cries from the heart—the crushing defeats, the terrible diagnoses, the death of children and everyone else we are sure we cannot live without and we don't -- because while life goes on it's never the same as before and neither are we.

Which brings us to the Letter to the Hebrews this morning.

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.”

Our hope is in Jesus Christ who has promised us over and over that God is with us and we will never be left alone-- but that means trusting in the unseen power and strength of that, not the illusory walls of the temples we all build.

But this does not mean the way ahead is easy, it only means that it is sure. The path forward is always there. But we must choose to follow it. The choice is ours.

I guarantee you it's a waste of time to listen to anyone who promises to tell you what God is doing these days. Spare me the talk of God working in mysterious ways. Taming and domesticating God, making the grandeur of the divine and all creation bite size is futile.

But what is not is holding onto God and trusting in the assurances of his son, our savior, Jesus Christ.

Faith is a muscle, and this is when all of us will find out if we have what it takes to run the race set before us. Together I know we can. Because the light St. Martin's has lit in all of us becomes a blaze of hope and bonfire of love when we go forward in Jesus' name, together. AMEN