

The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber

11.16.25

Not one stone will be left on one another. All will be thrown down. There will be earthquakes, famines and plagues, dreadful portents. They will arrest you and persecute you. You will be betrayed by your own family and friends. Some of you will be put to death. You will be hated.

Wow, what an uplifting Gospel we have for the day of Finlay's baptism! I mean, who wants to sign up for a movement like this? Today we hear the words of a fiery Jesus, a Jesus promising a frightening time of suffering ahead for his followers.

Where is the love in today's Gospel? Where is the love, Jesus? Where is the hope in all these visions of destruction and betrayal?

Today's readings make it so clear that the thing we are sometimes told about the Bible, that the Old Testament God is all about wrath and the New Testament God in Jesus is all about love, this thing that was declared a heresy in the early 300's but somehow we still can't get rid of it, well today's readings make it very clear that these ideas about the Old and New Testaments are just wrong. Today we see spicy and fiery Jesus delivering visions of destruction, and soaring, tender and hope-filled God speaking through Isaiah, telling of the wolf and lamb feeding peacefully together. Today, we have to go backwards to see the new life, the new heavens and earth that God is creating. We have to go backwards to see what God promises to all of us and what we affirm in baptism -- they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord.

And maybe this is the point. Because time is not a line in a graph that always goes upward, always moves toward progress or greater reward. Time is more like a circle, like the cycle of our liturgical seasons, repeating themes, repeating times of war and peace, of destruction and renewal. God is always there, showing Godself in the flowers bursting through the cracked pavement, in the light breaking through the opening in the brick wall.

It can be hard to see these signs, hard to discern whether something is another dreadful portent or something new, hard to tell whether it is another false prophet or Jesus.

This week there was either a cave or a compromise in Congress, I'm not really sure which, and I don't think I'm qualified to judge. To some it felt like a defeat, like a loss of fortitude, but at the same time, now people are being paid for work, people are getting access to food, and a lot of truth about sexual

abuse of children may soon be told. Everyone who signed the bill to start reopening the government has signed on to things they would not have agreed to before. Could this be enemies lying down together? Is something new breaking through at last? I'm really not sure.

We are living in times that are right at the edge of destruction and God's newness, right at the edge between death and new life.

I experienced this personally this past week. My friend Brother Dave died after a long period of illness. I have to say a long period rather than what we often say, a long struggle or fight, because Dave never fought his leukemia, he looked it right in the eye and accepted whatever it might bring, the same way he accepted whatever life and circumstance, whatever God might bring throughout his life.

I watched Dave's funeral on zoom last Friday. It was held in a Marist Brothers camp, a camp where Dave had served as head years before, where he had greeted many a child from the Bronx with his sunny smile and easy laugh, where he had looked at all of them in the same way that God is looking at Finn right now, the same way God looks at all of us, with a look of adoration and love. The funeral was a simple mass with recorded music. Dave's Marist brother Don came up to do the readings in a long sleeve t-shirt and slacks. I'm pretty sure he doesn't even own a suit.

It seems fitting to me that my friend's quiet and simple funeral came just a day before St Martin's weekend of big celebrations, the Celebration of New Ministry on Saturday and St Martin's and Consecration Sunday the next day. These were large and joy-filled services with lots of ceremony, lots of exquisite live music, lots of energy and spirit and a sense that something wonderfully new is unfolding in this congregation at this time.

The funeral and celebrations coming so close to each other seems fitting because this is how it is, life and death and new life and God, always there, always present in the quiet and the boisterous, in the end and the beginning, always unfolding, everywhere all at once.

We here at St Martin's get to continue our celebration of the new today. We are baptizing Finn to affirm something that is already true, that Finn is a beloved child of God. We are welcoming Finn into this community of Jesus followers, into this community of St Martin's.

We are making vows on Finn's behalf and renewing them for ourselves. They are fierce and fiery vows, vows as fierce and fiery as Jesus is in today's Gospel. To seek and serve Christ in all people, loving our neighbor as ourselves. To strive for justice and peace among all people.

These vows compel us to do hard things, to reach across lines of difference, to look at uncomfortable truths. Living into these vows is not easy. Living into these vows means we agree to be a part of God's breaking through, that we work to help bring God's kingdom to earth, right here and now.

My friend brother Dave has been part of that project his whole life. Today he is praying for us. Now it is Finn's turn, and our turn, to work with God. To help God continually create new heavens and a new earth. To say with God, and help make it so, that they shall never hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain. Amen.