

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 28C

November 16, 2025

Isaiah 65:17-25

Canticle 9 – Isaiah 12:2-6

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Luke 21:19

Beyond the Rubble

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another... The time is near!” The apocalyptic message is filled with images of war and conflict between nations, insurrections, discord among families, rising hatred, contempt, scorn... What has been... is about to be leveled to make way for the new. This is not a lesson from the Book of Revelation where we expect to encounter wild images of end times. The words from Luke are also a harbinger of Jesus’ own death that will cause the cosmos to quake as he breathes his last. Jesus is not offering words of calm comfort. We are not hearing from “Jesus the gentle shepherd.” Today we get tough plain talk about some of the harshest realities that life can offer... experiences that include conflict and fear... war and persecution. Apocalyptic imagery falls at the far end of human experience. As we encounter this troubling text, it is our job to find good news amidst the chaos and rubble.

A modern thesaurus will tell us that synonyms for the word “apocalypse” include, “annihilation,” “cataclysm,” and “devastation.” But if we explore the original Greek text, we find that the word “apocalypse” means that something new and life giving is in the wings ready to appear once the great clearing has taken place. In Biblical Greek, an apocalypse means “something being torn aside” ...like a curtain being pulled back to reveal something new... an “unveiling” of something secret and hidden. To experience an apocalypse is to get a fresh perspective... to gain new insight and knowledge, knowledge that can only be gleaned when tightly held world views are smashed and broken open to reveal new and deeper levels of meaning. Such is the powerful and mysterious gift of our gospel that reveals the powerful yet ineffable cosmic reality of life’s conclusive dominion over death.

The 1st century historian Josephus describes the great temple in Jerusalem as an awe-inspiring wonder. The temple’s size, alone, was immense. The temple was twice as large as the Roman Forum and four times as large as the Acropolis in Athens. Herod’s temple was adorned with so much gold... that it became a blinding spectacle when bathed in sunlight. Seeing the temple for the first time probably knocked the breath right out of the disciples. The temple was a brilliant, bold, unshakeable symbol of God’s presence and grandeur. Jesus had a different experience of the temple. When Jesus encounters the man-made monument... he sees through the illusion of permanence and misplaced adoration... he envisions the idolatrous glitz crumble and fall into rubble and ruin. In the year 70, decades after Jesus’ death, the temple will be destroyed and all that will remain will be a segment of the Western Wall that we know today as Jerusalem’s Wailing Wall... a place of grief and prayer. Because the gospel of Luke was written decades after Jesus’ death and

resurrection, it may well be that the author had firsthand knowledge of the temple's literal ruin. Yet it is curious that the author of Luke reports Jesus speaking of the temple's destruction decades before the temple became rubble. What was Jesus' prescient message regarding the temple's destruction about? Was it about coming peril... persecution... betrayal? The core of Jesus' overall message, however, never leaves us stuck in the rubble, or at the foot of the cross on Good Friday. Even when we hear Jesus foretelling his own death... we know that death will not have the last word. The promise is that new life is to come... and will be revealed in due time. What we think is important now... will be challenged and broken open to make way for a new day, a new reality. But until the apocalyptic curtain is pulled back to reveal the future's promise... we live in faith... and in hope... as we listen to Jesus and follow him in the ways of truth and life.

Apocalyptic stories confront us. They are inherently challenging. Apocalyptic stories invite us to encounter them with a willingness to have our illusions shattered. In her sermon *God in Pain*, Barbara Brown Taylor argues that disillusionment is essential to Christian life. Brown writes:

*"Disillusionment is, literally, the loss of an illusion, about ourselves, about the world, about God – and while it is almost always a painful thing, [disillusionment] is never a bad thing."*¹

Jesus' apocalyptic message is indeed challenging... and we have to ask ourselves: what precious bubbles of illusion need to be shattered for us... so that deeper truth may be revealed? Brown says that:

"The world for which [we] have been so carefully prepared is being taken away from [us] by the grace of God."

By the grace of God, our world views continue to be upended.... As we continue to be stretched, broken open, and our lives made new.

Wisdom tells us that humans suffer because we have a tendency to cling... because we tend to latch onto things, to people, to places... with all our might.. and it's the clinging that causes us pain. There is no judgement about whether our attachments are right or wrong. When a loved one dies... there is pain and grief... and I have never heard anyone say that they would trade the pain of a deep loss for the love they have known. Buddhists teach that it is possible to reduce the suffering of attachment and loss... with practices that help to release and let go. So it can go for Christian practices of prayer and devotion.

When it comes to images of God, we humans are prone to cling to the versions of God that satisfy and comfort us... often sidelining the God who challenges us in ways we don't like. We are prone to try to pin down and contain God with small definitions... akin to putting God in a small box of our own making. The very definition of God... is that God is beyond our limited human ability to comprehend God. The theologian Hans Küng states that:

"God is by definition that which cannot be defined, that which cannot be limited: a literally invisible, unfathomable, incomprehensible, infinite reality."

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *God in Pain: Teaching Sermons on Suffering*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1998.

As Christians, we believe that God sent Jesus to be incarnate, to be enfleshed, so that we would get a better understanding of God's powerful loving presence. In Jesus, we were given an experience of God that we can know for ourselves. God came to us... to walk among us... and beside us... so that we could encounter the enormity of God's love... in the flesh.

Yet down through the centuries, Christians have continued to define and confine God, Jesus, and his message. The 13th century mystic Meister Eckart wrote, "Let us pray to God to be free of God..." which suggests that our concepts of God are inherently limited and will always fall short. However, when we understand the basic human limitations of attempting to define God.... We can turn to prayer... asking God's help to let go of rigid images of God that are of our own design... and encounter the boundless God who calls us to ever-larger, ever-more-abundant life... beyond the limitations we humans tend to impose on God.

Life is inherently full of change. We know change as we move from one stage of life to another... as we move from one place to another... as family configurations morph with every birth, every new relationship, every marriage, every death, every parting, every new meeting. In the midst of all of life's changes... we tend to cling... and on our better days we willingly let go. When we walk with Christ, and with one another, we share the path of abundant life that flows constantly and unceasingly through all the changes and disruptions that life has to offer. In the end, Jesus promises that "By your endurance you will gain your souls." The invitation is to trust... that even amidst discomfort and seeming chaos... new life is seeking to be born in our lives and in our world.

Our work is to prepare for... and to welcome... the future that God intends for us as individuals, as families... and as a beloved community here at St. Barnabas.... a community that seeks to follow Jesus in the way of love.

The work of coping with change and of preparing for a new day...

means prayerfully rolling up our sleeves...

of praying the prayer of release...

...and then welcoming the changes,

... the challenges

...and the goodness that

has been promised...

...as we cast our gaze beyond the illusions of this moment and welcome the new life that is seeking to be born in our midst.

We pray this in the name of the one who died and rose again for us...

...making all things new...

Amen...