

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

“As for these things that you see,

the days will come when not one stone will be left on another;
all will be thrown down.”

Our readings today focus on the “End Times.”

As we approach the end of the church year

and prepare to begin our cycle anew with the celebration of Advent,
the church wanders into those sections of the Bible
that speak of the end of the world.

Jesus speaks the words we hear in our Gospel this morning

as he looks upon the Temple in Jerusalem,
newly rebuilt and refurbished by King Herod the Great.

It is actually the third temple,

the prior two having been destroyed by invading armies
after standing for four or five hundred years each.

Think of that for just a second and put it in perspective.

Twice the temple had been built

and lasted twice as long as the good ol’ U.S. of A. so far,
before it was destroyed by invading armies.

For the Jews in the first century it was a symbol of their nation,
of the blessing of God upon their endeavor.

It was a light to the other nations that lived in darkness,

a light even to the nation that currently occupied their Capital.

It was a symbol of power and safety even in defeat.

For Jesus it was different.

It was a symbol of the folly of humanity.

“...not one stone will be left on another.”

These types of stories are grouped together
under the heading of apocalyptic literature.

Apocalyptic literature is in vogue right now
with books like “The Road” and “Robopocalypse,”
or TV shows like “The Last Ship” and “The Walking Dead,”
or the video game series’ “Fallout,” and “Resident Evil.”

These types of stories were also popular during Jesus’ time
as evidenced by their many examples in the bible.

As we get deeper into the January 6 hearings,
and the rhetoric coming from both sides increases in tenor and heat,
there are some that believe
that we are now facing a governmental apocalypse
and maybe even civil war.

I have to say that I am one of them,
but not for the reason you might think.

Though the word apocalypse is strongly associated
with the end times and death and destruction,
what it really means is the opposite of eclipse.

To eclipse means to cover up,
and so apocalypse is simply to uncover.

The great apocalypse that the January 6 insurrection riot has uncovered
is that we as a nation are not who we say we are.

The United States aren’t!

We are not united.

We have let fear, and anger, and hurt
divide us more now than anytime since our Civil War.

This wasn’t caused by an election result, or impeachment or insurrection hearings,
but it has been revealed by them.

And even worse, acts of misbehavior and violence on both sides

have been on the rise now for many years.

I pray that they are not harbingers of worse to come.

I pray that they do not signal the beginning of the end.

Through the hard work of compromise,

deep forgiveness founded in honest love and respect,

and a clear vision of what is right and just and true,

we may recover our senses,

step back from the brink,

and pull together as a nation.

That is the future I pray for,

but the sad truth is, that one day the United States will be no more.

The great experiment of American Democracy

will be lost to the history books

like the great civilizations of Egypt, Greece, Rome, and so many others.

Not because we were unworthy or did something wrong per se,

but because that is the way of things.

Things of this world,

whether people, or governments,

or the sun, or the moon,

or anything else you could name

will one day come to an end.

If this were truly the end of the story it would be a bitter story indeed,

and we might rightly wonder why we were even made in the first place.

In that great question of misery and anguish however,

lie the very seeds of its own answering.

Why was I made?

What is my purpose in life?

The deep and wonderful reality that we as Christians have to share with the world,

and the reason Jesus brings up the destruction of the temple in the first place,

is that death isn't the end of the story.

We were made; by a God who loves us,
and cares for us and about us.

Who loves us so much, that God broke into creation
to save us from ourselves.

Cares for us with *hesed*, a Hebrew word meaning -faithful loving-kindness-
hesed that is so faithful, so loving, and so kind,
that it is beyond our reason;
beyond our ability to fully comprehend.

And God gives us everything we have;
indeed gives us so much
that it is difficult for us to take it in most times.

When we forget this reality
and mistakenly put our faith in the powers of this world
we sell ourselves short;
we shut the book before the end of the story.

And we put at very real risk the wonderful world to come.

And it's just so darn easy to do;
so easy because the abundance of gifts that God has given us
are so wonderful and so powerful.

This world that God has given us is such a rich and seductive place.

It's almost as if Gods abundance works against us,
like grandparents spoiling their grandchildren.

Actually, now that I think about it, that's a pretty good example,
because I don't think children are ever really spoiled by their Grandparents,
though it sure can look like it from a parents perspective.

The Gospel message that we have to share with the world,
and, truth be told, that the world is so desperately in need of,
especially right now,

is that God loves us.

And even though the world is desperately trying to convince us otherwise,
that reality is enough.

If we can just remember,

in spite of what so many other people are trying to tell us,
that God loves us and cares about us,
we gain a whole new perspective on life.

It's not that this new perspective makes life any easier, it doesn't.

Jesus is very clear on that.

“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers,
by relatives and friends;

and they will put some of you to death.

You will be hated by all...”

It's just that you won't take it so personally anymore;

because you've found the way through;

And friends, I believe we are going to need that way through.

In the last six years we have seen a sharp rise of intolerance,
as well as acts of violence, rebellion, and hate.

We, as a people of peace

are needed now more than any time in recent history
to live into the Gospel message of Love and justice
as a shining example to those around us.

To stand with those who would be marginalized or cast out;
to be the voice crying out in the wilderness.

As we say in our Baptismal Covenant,

we must strive to seek and serve Christ in all persons,
loving our neighbors as ourselves.

And let me be clear; that means all people.

Not just the ones that think like you or look like you, or voted like you;

All people.

I know this will not be easy.

It will require the best in us.

We do, however, have cause for hope.

Remember that we tackle this great endeavor with God's help.

We are not alone.

We are never alone.

God will be with us in our struggles,

helping us to persevere when we grow tired,

and forgiving us when we fail.

To begin this new endeavor, I invite us to prayer.

The Lord be with you, etc.

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit

may so move every human heart

and especially the hearts of the people of this land,

that barriers which divide us may crumble,

suspensions disappear, and hatreds cease;

that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Heavenly Father, in your Word you have given us a vision of that holy City

to which the nations of the world bring their glory:

Behold and visit, we pray, all the cities of our land.

Renew the ties of mutual regard which form our civic life.

Send us honest and able leaders.

Enable us to eliminate poverty, prejudice, and oppression,

that peace may prevail with righteousness,

and justice with order,

and that men and women from different cultures and with differing talents

may find with one another the fulfillment of their humanity;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Indeed, Amen.