

The 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
Daniel 12:1-3  
Psalm 16  
Hebrews 10:11-14 [15-18] 19-25  
Mark 13:1-8

Pastor Lindsey Jorgensen- Skakum  
November 18, 2018  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

---

Grace and peace to your all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

This morning, as we head towards the end of our church year, we begin to hear more and more of these worrying texts about the end of days. Texts that tend to prick our ears, and cause us to wonder if we came to the right service today.

Because it's not too often – in this church at least – that we hear so many texts filled with fire and brimstone from the pulpit on a Sunday.

Whether it's Daniel's prophetic telling of the coming anguish, Saint Paul's writings of hope for the end of days in Hebrews, or even Jesus promise that there will be a more suffering before the apocalypse even gets going – we simply don't spend much time focusing on these matters here at Holy Spirit.

And maybe it's because many of us get at least a little uncomfortable when people start talking about these things. After all, from many of our perspectives, these prophetic narratives can be explained away – and if not – we begin to find them more troubling than comforting in the end. This is because texts like these tend to serve as a reminder we often don't need – a reminder that our world is a hurting and a troubled place to begin with. Whether it is the devastating fires in California that came to destroy entire cities this week, tragic and senseless mass shootings, or even the spread of hateful acts against our Jewish neighbors right here in our city. The truth of the matter is that our world has enough problems to keep us awake at night – so why add more fuel to the fire by focusing on these texts?

Yet, these are the very texts people of faith yearned to hear – for thousands of years – as they came to find themselves in desperate times and places. And as with many things – we need to hear and know a little more context to understand why these hard words may have been important for so many faithful people over time. In the case of our first reading – we need to understand the people Daniel was prophetically speaking to were in the midst of deep suffering and pain.

They had always thought of themselves as God's faithful people. They had been beloved and held in their Jewish community from birth. They had learned to trust in the Covenants and Laws of God for not only their wholeness – but also as a way to live justly with their neighbor. Yet, even though they trusted and followed God with their whole heart - they still found themselves in the midst of one of the most oppressive and hostile forces of their time – the Babylonian Empire.

When the Babylonians came a knocking, there was not simply an invitation to join a new team – it was a death sentence for all who would come to stand against them and their beliefs. Which meant Daniel's people were actively being harassed, persecuted, and even killed because of their faith. It was a time so horrible, it would come to be remembered and passed down for generations – which is how we come to find Daniels prophetic words in the Hebrew Scriptures today.

This having been said, something else we need to note about this text and time – is that Daniel was also caught in the throws of this Babylonian captivity. And so he was not able to speak directly about this situation he or his community found themselves in. So Daniel used this apocalyptic story to comfort and give hope to his people suffering under the power of their abusers.

In our first reading, he speaks of a day when the injustices Israel has come to face will fade away – a great and horrible day filled with anguish for those who have hurt the children of God. Yet a day of great celebration for those who have born the brunt of abuse and shame. A day so great – Daniel says – that even those who have come to die under the evils of this Babylonian regime will rise from their graves to know God’s justice in their name. A day that will come to mark their freedom from captivity.

And in sharing these prophetic words Daniel speaks a hidden truth to power – bringing light to the deepest darkness of God’s people. Telling them to hold on to hope even if they have little else to hold on to.

But, this experience is nothing new for people of faith. During even the hardest of times of our lives we have turned time and time again to what can bring us hope, and what can draw us together as a community once more. Whether it be through the words of Daniel or the prophetic voices of our day. We come to hear voices – rising up for justice, for hope, and for peace – even in the midst of desperate times – and it helps us to trust and know that a better world is possible for us all to work towards.

And that kind of hope is a very powerful thing.

It’s the kind of hope that is the most faithful of confessions for us to say as people of God. It’s the kind of confession that clearly says - that today we have heard and felt the great injustices of our world – but that today we will not let them have the last word on our lives or our worth because we know we are also beloved children of God.

And this hope is not just born in the words and lives of those we come to admire for their resilience and courage – it is also born in the songs of their hearts as they continue to hope even in the midst of the darkness. Its brought forth in Spirituals like “My Lord What a Morning” and “Soon and Very Soon”. Both songs we will sing together today – but both songs that takes us back to another time and place where the sorrow and hope of many enslaved African communities throughout the Southern United States were brought to voice through the heart of their songs.

Like the prophet Daniel before them in captivity – many of these enslaved peoples were unable to truly express their hopes and dreams for a world of freedom for their community. So they sang in a special code, using biblical images to talk about their sorrows and to voice their hopes for their escape and redemption here and now. And many of these great spiritual songs were composed spontaneously in moments of great trial and tribulation and passed down through the generations – just as Daniel’s story had been centuries ago.

The late great African American spiritual singer Joe Carter had grown up surrounded by a community who had kept many of these Spirituals alive over the years. As a teenager Mr. Carter had come to meet an eighty-year-old woman named Jessie Anthony whose parents were slaves in Virginia. Each week he would walk to pick Ms. Anthony up for church, and each week as they walked she would teach him a new spiritual as well as the deeper meaning behind it.

During an interview on the podcast “*On Being*” back in 2010, Joe Carter shared one of the many songs and stories that has stuck with him from his walks with Ms. Anthony - I’ll let him tell that story for himself...

Transcript: Emancipation Day

*And there was a group of former slaves now on an island off the coast of South Carolina...And they were waiting for the emissary of the government to arrive in his little boat to tell them that they had received the deeds to their land, because the government had promised them not only freedom, but 40 acres and a mule.*

*And so this was going to be a great, wonderful day. And the former slaves had gathered together on the island waiting with bated breath. And finally, they saw the boat of the officer approaching. And they could tell, even from the distance, that his face was not happy and his expression was somewhat sad. And they said there was a groan that just came from the crowd. And one of the older women from the crowd just stood up and began to make up a song on the spot. She sang, [singing]*

*"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Glory, hallelujah."*

*And then she spoke, looking to the people around her, she said, [singing]*

*"Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down. Oh, yes, Lord. Sometimes, I'm almost level to the ground. Oh, yes, Lord. Oh, nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Glory, hallelujah."*

*She looked at the people standing by, and she said, [singing] "Although you see me going along so." And they answered, [singing] "Oh, yes, Lord." "I've got my trials here below." And they answered, [singing] "Oh, yes, Lord. Oh, nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Glory, hallelujah."*

These early spirituals were also called “sorrow songs” because they were the expression of the great pain. But at the same time, they were always looking up and reaching out to God for hope.

And so within these spirituals we find the holiest of paradox's – the need to cry out against God for the very real suffering this community came to endure and yet in the same breath the need to praise God for the almighty “and yet” they had heard proclaimed. Singing a verse like...

I am lost ... and yet I am beloved,  
I am in pain ... and yet I am blessed,  
I am disrespected ... and yet I still have dignity,  
I am suffering ... and yet I am still alive.

While our own context and time is different from those who lived, breathed, and sung the spirituals into being not that long ago – we have our own trials and troubles we come to carry in our lives here and now.

And I have heard people who have been in the midst such times within our community share with me that they have come to church – even when they feel most lost in grief or doubt – not because they think they will miraculously find God here - but because they trust the voices within this community to carry their prayers and their hopes to God – even if they are unable to say them themselves.

It's one of the many gifts of community when we come to share in the liturgy, our hymns, our prayers, or the Lord's Holy meal – we come to be knit together as God's beloved people. A community that does not pride itself on perfection – but on the realness of those gathered here to be welcomed, nourished, and cared for in Jesus name.

So perhaps these stories and songs like those of Daniel and the Spirituals aren't just doom and gloom after all. Perhaps they have an important lesson to teach us all. A lesson in resiliency and hope.

A lesson that refuses to give up on the fact that God's kingdom is coming even in the midst of great stress or pain – and that we have an important role to play in that message being upheld in our world. A lesson born out of the bounds of sadness and despair that refused to stop clinging to hope. And isn't that a lesson we could all use a little more of today?

So, I'd like to invite you - as we sing *“My Lord, What a Morning”* and *“Soon and Very Soon”* today – listen to the hope that is to be found in the midst of its prophetic call.

That one day Christ will return triumphant – waking the nations of Saints underground – to proclaim and end to the injustice in our life and world. And until that day – we are invited to listen for the ways we are being invited to embrace the coming kingdom of God – a kingdom of justice and peace ... even when it seems like it may never come. And listen for the holiest of “And Yet's” that tell us time and time again that God will never forget us or the injustice we may come to face even if the world would have us believe something different...

And so this morning I would like to invite you to rise as you are able and lift your voices in song and in defiant hope and justice for our lives and world.