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THE HOPEFUL SIDE OF THE APOCALYPSE

Luke 21:25-36

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Where do you go when there is nowhere left to stand?

The lectionary scripture for the first Sunday of Advent this year is a jarring passage (I was tempted to skip it all together) of apocalyptic genre from the Gospel according to Luke (21:25-36). In Greek, the term apocalypse means to uncover and peel away layers of pretense and illusion, and to reveal lasting truths that we cannot hide from or avoid. Such raw revelation can be upsetting, but necessary, for those longing to be faithful to God and one another.

Metaphorically, Jesus says that it's as if sun, moon, and stars are spiraling out of control when the powers that be and idolatries of life are exposed. After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by Roman power in A.D. 70, early Christian communities were in need of encouragement that their journey of faith was not a lost cause.

The historical seminar of Jesus tends to view apocalyptic scriptures as less than authentic to the historical Jesus; but, apocalyptic genre, and messengers, would've been well familiar to Jesus. Such apocalyptic messages predated Jesus by 150 years, but also likely contemporary to Jesus as well.

There is the possibility that early Christian community offered an apocalyptic voice more than the historical Jesus himself. I'm of the persuasion that Jesus embodied both elements of social reformer and apocalyptic messenger; but that the apocalyptic message of Jesus is often misunderstood and misinterpreted; here are a few positive ways that I think the apocalyptic voice can speak to progressive and modern day believers:

- 1.) The apocalyptic voice is affirming of how hard life is; sometimes, we need affirmation that life is indeed hard; that the world we live in is harsh and frightening at times.

At some point near the last of the Thanksgiving holiday week, my oldest gained possession of the T.V. remote and selected "Planet Earth II" on Netflix (narrated by BBC David Attenborough). The whole family was on the edge of our couch cushions when the narrative shifted focus to a newly hatched iguana, borne just mere moments before, idling cautiously on the beach of Fernandina Island, an unspoiled volcanic landscape and part of the Galápagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador.

Not long after the baby iguana emerges from its hatched egg and carefully inches across the volcanic and rocky shoreline, a swift and determined predator racer snakes appears stealthily behind the young and naive iguana. At this point, my sympathetic and animal loving family is screaming at the T.V., "**Run, Forrest, Run!**"

Ready or not, like a scene out of Indiana Jones, when Indy is surrounded by slithering snakes on all sides, multiple racer snakes emerge out of the crags and rocky corners of the beach and give full chase to an innocent and horrified iguana that just moments prior was concealed from and oblivious to the volatile and hungry outside world. On youtube there is a 2 minute remake of the Planet Earth where rapper Snoop Dogg offers lively commentary of the life and death race between the iguana and racer snakes... I digress...

The news these days feels apocalyptic (scorching fires, fleeing and tear gassed refugees, acts of mass violence, runaway poverty and economic inequality, i.e.), and yet, the unfair systems and unsustainable practices of human greed, that threaten the shaky ground of our existence, are clearly being exposed— such is the nature of apocalypse.

Such harsh realities and hard moments require people of faith to rise up and respond as hopeful agents of God's ready mercy and love. Our faith's devotional task is to fix and train our attention on the Kin-dom of God, the unfolding dream of God's love here and now, in such uncertain and turbulent times

- 2.) The apocalyptic voice is a call to action; Jesus said be alert (vs 34 "be on guard...") — or as I tell my kids, keep your head on a swivel. Faith is active. Faith is a matter of movement— movement through praying, hoping, loving, showing mercy, etc.
- 3.) The apocalyptic voice is strangely hopeful. Jeremiah speaks of a hopeful shoot growing out of the ground of Jesse; Jesus says that, despite the apocalypse and the imminent reign of the kingdom of God, there is a fig tree that will continue on. Nadia Blotz-Webber contends that the apocalyptic voice is saying that **dominant powers are not ultimate powers.**

Lastly Jesus spoke in parables— the use of parables are perfect tools for apocalyptic teaching.

Peter Rollins describes parables as an imaginary hand grenade that de-centers and disorients world views; up becomes down... active faith runs counter intuitive to the way the world apart from God operates:

Whereas the way of the world apart from God harbors bitterness and resentment, the way faith moves in mercy toward forgiveness;

Whereas the way of the world apart from God follows the ambition of self over the good of others, the way of faith is loving others as we long to be loved ourselves.

Parables often highlight the difference between a life of faith and lives lived absent of faith in God.

If speaking in parables serves as a tool to decenter our worldly inclinations, then communion is tool that serves as a centering and reconciliatory purpose.

Communion speaks to the act of being in community. When we break bread, it's intended to meet the spiritual needs of wholeness and affirmation for all around the table— and who is invited to the table— all who hears and responds to God's invitation of divine love.

The communion table is an open table of hospitality extended to all regardless of one's particular orientation or any hesitation of self doubt.

When we share the cup of Christ, it's in hope that God's love will both renew and recreate our connections both with the divine and one another. Amen.