

Advent 1c

Luke 21.25-38

Do you listen to the created world?

Drought, fire, floods all at the same time in this land...cataclysmic is the word for what is happening!

On the news we heard of children, voicing their concerns about climate change. In the Gospel reading we also heard about climate change: cataclysmic events signalling the end of an era, metaphor and story..

Throughout history people have seen these events in their own time as signs. People are afraid. But Jesus is inviting vigilance and trust. He, like Job is inviting us to look and listen and search for the signs of God's presence in our lives. Earlier in our lectionary we heard God's answer to Job, "look listen, who created all this? Trust me".

A month or so ago, as you know we had a quiet afternoon in the Botanic Gardens. I learnt so much from that time of looking and listening to God in the created world. Probably some of you are better at this than me, those of you who are from farming backgrounds, those of you who are gardeners, those of you who sit still. But for me the Quiet time was revelatory. I spent time with a dead tree.

This dead tree is in the Botanic Gardens, right near the leaf stage. It is home to a hive of bees. The tree is like a modern sculpture, outlined against the blue sky. On our quiet afternoon in the gardens, I spent time with that still and present tree, a sanctuary to those productive bees.

After a while a stunning blue green peacock wandered past, such a contrast to that silent tree, it shone. I gather that peacocks are symbols for Christ. They were seen to be immortal. So I was greeted by this extravagant life alongside the lined dead tree home.

Are these two, parts of myself?

What is God saying to me in all this?

There is something about space which is attractive, and enables the fullness to bloom or blossom. That hole in the tree became space for new life.. My life contains much of that silence and stillness – space... Walking around the lakes in the mornings, meditating, evening prayer, Retreats, quiet days, listening to people in spiritual

direction, silence in our Sunday services, morning and evening prayer

This receptive womb, tomb, cave space enables the bees to flourish, nourishes the peacock with his colours, is a place for birds to nest..

This week we hear Jesus¹ “little apocalypse.” It seems a sobering and grim way to welcome us into a season that in the Christian tradition is a time of expectation and celebration and that the wider culture typically depicts as cheery. Yet in greeting us as we cross the threshold into Advent, this apocalypse-in-miniature reminds us that this season bids us not only to remember and celebrate the Christ who has already come to us, but also to anticipate and look toward the fullness of time when he will bring about the redemption of the world.

That’s what Jesus is really getting at in this passage, after all: he is not offering these apocalyptic images in order to scare us but rather to assure his listeners that the healing of the world is at hand, and that they need to stay awake, stay alert, and learn to read the signs of what is ahead. He is calling them not to crumble or quail when intimations of the end come but instead to

“stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Jesus urges his hearers—and us—toward practices that help them stay grounded and centred in their daily lives so that they won’t be caught unawares in the days to come.

As we enter into Advent again and again, we are called to circle back around the apocalypse, to revisit its landscape, to take in its terrain. With its annual return, and its repetitive challenge to us, this passage puts me in mind of an episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Preparing to save the world yet again, a weary Buffy has this exchange with Giles, her Watcher:

Buffy: How many apocalypses is this now?

Giles: About six, I think.

Buffy: Feels like a hundred.

¹ <http://adventdoor.com/2012/11/25/advent-1-drawing-near/>. Jan Richardson

The season of Advent gives us the apocalypse each year not only so that we might recognise it, should it come, but also—and perhaps especially—that we might enter more mindfully into our present landscape and perceive the signs of how God is working out God’s longing in the world here and now.

The root meaning of the word **apocalypse**, after all, is **revelation**. And God is, in every time and season, about the work of revealing God’s presence. The one who came to us two millennia ago as Emmanuel, God-with-us, and who spoke of a time when he would come again in fullness, reveals himself even now in our midst, calling us to see all the guises in which he goes about in this world.²

Advent reminds us, year in and year out, that although we are to keep a weather eye out for cosmic signs, we must, like the fig tree that Jesus evokes in this passage, be rooted in the life of the earth. And in the rhythm of our daily lives here on earth, Christ bids us to practice the apocalypse. He calls us in each day and moment to do the things that will stir up our courage and keep us grounded in God, not only that we may perceive Christ when he comes, but also that we may recognise him even now. There is a sense, after all, in which we as Christians live the apocalypse on a daily basis. Amid the destruction and devastation that are ever taking place in the world, Christ beckons us to perceive and to participate in the ways that he is already seeking to bring redemption and healing for the whole of creation.

As we enter the season of Advent, and spiral yet again around the landscape that this first Sunday gives to us,

how might Christ be inviting you to practice the apocalypse?

What are the habits that keep you centred in God, that sharpen your vision, and that help you recognise the presence of Christ in this world?

How do you participate in the redemption that God is ever working to bring about within creation?

What is it that you long for in these Advent days?³

² <http://adventdoor.com/2012/11/25/advent-1-drawing-near/>. Jan Richardson

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The advent app 'songs from a strange land' from ABM also invites this listening, this waiting in hope.

We can stand in solidarity with all affected by the drought. We can pray for rain, indeed God is calling us to pray, to bring our requests before God, even though God knows our desires even before we ask so in faith, hope and love we act.

Why Advent? To help us see beyond our present.

Why Advent? To give us a lens through which to see God at work when it seems only evil gets the spotlight.

Why Advent? To assure us that God has secured a future for us that breaks into our present, and really, truly changes our here and now.⁴

Now when these things begin to happen, stand tall, lift up your heads, because your liberation is drawing close.

Susanna

⁴ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3740> Karoline Lewis