

A Better Source

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November 14, 2021. Christ reminds his disciples in their day and us in ours that whatever news may come, important truths about ourselves and the faithfulness of God are being unveiled, and there is always a better source.

Readings: [Hebrews 10:11-25](#), [Mark 13:1-8](#)

*** Transcript ***

The news can be overwhelming sometimes, can't it? In our communities, and around the world, there is so much that is painful, violent, and destructive. All you have to do is look at the news each day to see it: political upheaval, hunger, challenges in employment (both for employers and workers), illness and death from COVID, the impact of climate change, the list goes on and on. Sometimes it feels like there's no reason for hope.

And more than ever before, it seems, what we hear about the events of our world depends greatly on the source. Just think about the difference in how the Minnesota and Missouri news presented the results of the 1987 World Series when the Twins beat the Cardinals!

And in the last few years, with so much misinformation and even intentional disinformation flooding our media, it has gotten more and more difficult to see things clearly, hasn't it? I would almost not be surprised to see stories, with pictures included, describing the beauty of the grass coming back in the spring in glorious shades of pink, with comments back and forth arguing "all sides of the issue." And yet there is so much happening that is far more serious, and profound, than colored grass, clamoring for our attention, and as many perspectives on them as there are people in this world.

This is a very human thing, and in our gospel today the disciples and Jesus are seeing the same thing with very different eyes, as theologian and author Debie Thomas points out in her 2018 reflection on this text in her blog *Journey with Jesus*. She writes:

"Dazzled by the architectural majesty surrounding them, one of the disciples asks Jesus to notice something in return: 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' . . . But Jesus isn't dazzled. Instead, he responds to the disciple's remark with a question: 'Do you see these great buildings?' Why does Jesus ask the disciple if *he* can see what the disciple has just asked *Jesus* to see? Aren't the two of them seeing the same thing? Well, no. They're not. They are not seeing the same thing at all.

"What the disciple sees is a large architectural marvel, yes, but it's also the biggest, boldest, and most unshakeable symbol of God's presence that he can imagine. . . . But what does Jesus see? He sees ruins. Rubble. Destruction. Fragility, not permanence. Loss, not glory. Change, not stasis. 'Not one stone will be left upon another,' Jesus tells the stunned disciple. 'All will be thrown down.'" — Debie Thomas

This gospel today, and our other readings as well, contain a lot of apocalyptic imagery. It feels depressing, full of destruction, hopelessness, even despair. And the same can be said of the events of our world sometimes, as what has been falls away, and we can't yet see what is coming. It's hard to find our way to hope when things that seemed as solid as stone walls are bound to come down. There are moments these days, sometimes more than moments if we're honest about it, when we feel we are

living through an apocalypse of sorts.

Thomas goes on to reflect on apocalypse, bringing a different perspective to this conversation, and our scripture. Debie Thomas writes:

"But in fact, 'apocalypse' means something quite different. An apocalypse is an unveiling. [Or, to use American author and social activist Adrienne Maree Brown's words, an *uncovering*.] In 2016, in the midst of racial unrest, she wrote, 'Things are not getting worse, they are getting uncovered. We must hold each other tight and continue to pull back the veil.'

"In this sense, what Jesus offers his disciples is an apocalyptic vision. He invites them to look beyond the grandeur of the temple, and recognize that God will not suffer domestication. The temple is not the epicenter of his salvific work; God is not bound by mortar and stone. God exceeds every edifice, every institution, every mission statement, every strategic plan, and every symbol human beings create in God's name. Moreover, God is not enslaved to superlatives; *we're* the ones easily seduced by the newest, the biggest, the shiniest. *'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!'* " — Debie Thomas

So how are we called to think and live, about the times we are in right now? The “fallings apart” and the “lettings go” that are part of this and every age are endings, and the grief is real. And, the life and the new thing that is being uncovered, the movement of the Spirit in our world right here and right now, is also very real.

Hebrews was written in about 63 AD, just a few years before the temple in Jerusalem literally came down, stone off of stone, at the hands of the Roman occupiers who sought to quell the movement of the Spirit among the people. Perhaps even more interestingly, the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus tells his disciples that the buildings they are admiring will come down was written in about 70 AD, as the dust of that unthinkable destruction was settling.

So Jesus' words today in the gospel about stone coming down from stone is not theoretical. The author of Hebrews and their readers were living in the days leading up to the greatest apocalypse they could imagine. Mark's audience was surrounded by the rubble.

The good news is that nothing happening in our day comes as a surprise to God, and we have the inspired words of people of faith who came before us to guide us in our time. The author of Hebrews counsels the people to not neglect meeting with one another, encouraging one another. It has been hard to do this for the last two years, hasn't it? In many ways we have failed in the midst of the challenges of COVID, and in many ways we have done that fabulously. In these times that can still feel somewhat apocalyptic as we journey between what has been and what will be, we are invited to recommit ourselves to being the church to one another and the community in which we live in new ways.

The news may tell us something of what is happening, but if we are looking for a Spirit-led perspective on our world and our call in it, our source for truth and hope of the events of our day, Jesus is always the better source. It is Christ who raises Lazarus from the tomb to show us that death is not the final word. It is the one who proclaims that no stone will be left on another who points us to the work of the Spirit that won't be contained by walls and buildings.

If we take to heart the words of Christ and Hebrews, and seek the better source, we remember that Jesus promised that truth would set us free, not bind us. We will notice, amidst the illness and death and

selfishness and fear of COVID, the Spirit alive in how we have cared for one another, witnessed people investing all that they have to develop treatments and preventions that didn't seem possible. The reality of climate change shows some of the worst that humans can do, and reveals humanity at its best choosing to live well in God's creation. The visibility of racism and other oppression demonstrates the ugliness of our human condition, and unveils the movement of the Spirit toward honesty, healing, and justice for all people.

Apocalypse, we learn from our scriptures today, is about destruction and endings, but is much more so about the Spirit of God all around us that cannot be destroyed. Christ reminds his disciples in their day and us in ours that whatever news may come, important truths about ourselves and the faithfulness of God are being unveiled, and there is always a better source.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

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