

Falling-Apart-Times and Ordinary Days

By: Meagan McLaughlin

November 13, 2022. In falling-apart-times, we're afraid. And Jesus tells us that as much as we may want to, as hard as we may try, we can't understand it or change it. But in those times, when the stones are coming down, God is present. And God will guide us and enable us to embody the love and mercy of God, no matter what is happening around us.

Readings: [Malachi 4:1-2a](#), [2 Thessalonians 3:6-13](#), [Luke 21:5-19](#)

*** Transcript ***

Often, when we come across apocalyptic passages like in our gospel today, images of people carrying signs saying “the end of the world is near” come to mind. We read them and often read on, letting these words pass, as we live our lives in a world that generally feels pretty settled, comfortable, and stable. We see the destruction as something that will come someday, in the future — perhaps when Jesus does come again. But not here. Not now. Not today.

And then, there are “those” days. Days when everything we knew seems, in one way or another, to have disappeared. Days which become markers in our lives, creating a “before” and an “after” that will forever be different.

September 11, 2001, is one of those days that many of us of a certain age or older will not easily forget. I was at work, when my co-worker exclaimed in shock about the plane that had crashed into the Trade Center in Manhattan, and the two of us spent the greater part of the day glued to the TV.

Over the weeks to come, I found myself shaken to the core. I was afraid of what the future held, in a way I had never been. I felt economically vulnerable. I grieved for the loss of so many lives, as we all did, and the devastation for families who had lost loved ones that day. Nothing felt safe, or secure, or familiar anymore. Grief, anxiety, isolation, confusion.

I remember talking to my dad in the weeks after September 11, as I struggled to find solid ground again. And he told me that he had experienced just such uncertainty, fear, and grief, following the assassination of President Kennedy 40 years earlier — a national tragedy which also rattled everyone who lived through it. Grief, anxiety, isolation, confusion.

March 15, 2020 is another day that will be with me, and many of us, forever. I remember gathering in this very space for Worship that day. I remember those who were here, and many who were not, as COVID-19 had begun to take hold in our community. Bishop Susan Candea was here with us that morning as we agreed to take a pause in gathering in person, and in so doing entered a trauma none of us would have anticipated. The virus, we thought, just a few days before that, was not here, but overseas. We wouldn't be impacted, not really. And then came the stay-at-home orders. Empty shelves, where toilet paper and other necessities were supposed to be. Days stretched to weeks, to months, to over a year, as we worked and studied and worshipped from home, learned new technology, crossed streets to give ourselves space to breathe, wondering as time went on when we would ever get back to normal — and realizing, even still today, that we probably never will return to what felt like normal before, not really. Grief, anxiety, isolation, and confusion.

Collective events like those, the violence and challenges to democracy in our own country, viruses that

threaten life across the globe, and personal experiences like losing a loved one or receiving a life-altering diagnosis, can leave us feeling shaken, and unsure about anything. On days like those, Jesus' words about walls coming down (like we have on our altar today) and wars and insurrections in the Gospel of Luke, and the prophetic words of Malachi describing fires destroying everything, are no longer future possibilities and theories, but our lived reality as the world we knew in the "before" seems to crumble. It was lived reality for those listening to Luke, as they walked in the shadows of the ruins where the Temple used to be. Their whole world shattered. Their connection God changed forever, in ways they couldn't understand yet.

Of course, in those falling-apart-times, we're afraid, and that's exactly why Luke would want to share these particular words of Jesus.

Jesus wanted the disciples and us to know that no matter what happens, and how final it seems, it is not yet the end of the story. Destruction, trauma, and death, will never be the final word.

And Jesus tells us that as much as we may want to, as hard as we may try, we can't understand it or change it. In fact, we don't need to know what to say, or how to make sense of it all. Because in those times when everything seems to be falling apart, when the stones are coming down, God is present even when we can't perceive it. And in each and every moment, God will guide us and enable us to embody the love and mercy of God, no matter what is happening around us.

We, as people of faith together, can face those times when the world seems to be falling apart differently because of this promise. We, as people of faith together, can live life differently on ordinary days because of this promise. As people of faith together.

We witness the stones falling, and the fires burning, and we bear witness in our lives to the promise of God's love, justice, and mercy that will never fall or burn.

Last week we heard the Beatitudes in our gospel, illustrating for us one way of bearing this witness in falling-apart-times and ordinary days. As Roger pointed out, in our letter to the Ephesians, we are called to take action each and every day to embody this promise. Our passage from Malachi today gives the image of the calf leaping from the stall — claiming the joy and energy of new life in the midst of the fires.

Jesus tells us today in those times when we are shaken, and perhaps exhausted, and maybe a little lost, that we can trust that in each and every moment, we will have the words, and the life, and the hope that we need to share God's promise with a world that is feeling the same way.

Today, we are reminded that God holds us in our brokenness, exhaustion, and fear. Healing comes, as Malachi says, when we are most wounded. And we are transformed, prepared in each and every moment to embody the holding, and the healing, and the life, and the love in the unique ways God has given to us, in all times. We witness the brokenness, and the beauty, of the world around us, and we bear witness in our lives as we share all that God has given us with courage and with hope. We celebrate today all that we, in this community gathered, have been given, and offer all that we are. And we trust as we will sing in a few minutes, that God will guide us and provide all that we need along the way. Because, family of Christ Lutheran, as all of our scripture tells us today, the story isn't over yet. In falling-apart-times and ordinary days, the hope and healing of God lift us up and surround us, and we are sent to share that promise with the world.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

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