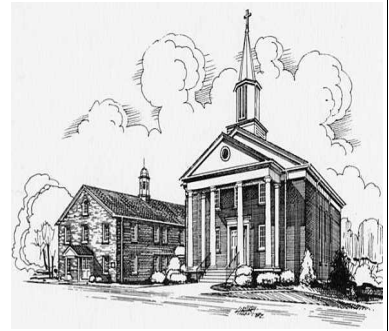


**The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Sunday closest to November 16**

**Proper 28
Year B
RCL**



Daniel 12:1-3
Psalm 16
Mark 13:1-8

The Collect

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Daniel 12:1-3

The Lord spoke to Daniel in a vision and said, “At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

Mark 13:1-8

As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom

against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.”

SERMON

My heart is broken! I've had CNN on all weekend and I can't believe what I'm seeing! After months of watching news coverage of fathers with their children on their shoulders, mothers with babes in arms, little boys and girls walking down endless railroad tracks, their belongings in their hands, trying to escape the evil shadow that has overtaken their homes, we now see the people of Paris victims of people who know no compassion, people who revel in death and actually seek it out. It's awful. There's no other word for it. Not since the Nazis has such a horror stalked our world. How are we to respond to evil on such a scale?

Perhaps the better question would be, "How are we supposed to respond to evil on such a scale without becoming evil ourselves?" The solutions which come to mind in a society such as ours cannot be the answer.

Let's investigate why that is so. To do that, we need some shared background before we can discuss the two passages for today, for both passages are anachronistic. They speak of one time in history, but were written in another to bring hope and healing to that later time. We desperately need that word of hope and healing today.

The Book of Daniel recounts events from the Sixth Century BCE, when the first Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Jews exiled to Babylon. I simply don't have words powerful enough to paint the sense of hopelessness those Jews felt on that long exile, but I see it echoed in the news today. Why are we so damnably proficient at murder and so challenged by compassion? We have leisure enough to get all self-righteous over what does or doesn't appear on a coffee cup. These people were stripped to the bone with no assurance that their children, their hope for the future,

would live to adulthood.

The Lord spoke to Daniel in a vision and said, “At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

“It’s awful right now, but it will get better”, Daniel is saying. “It is not the end.” The tricky part of this message comes when we realize that the actual audience the Book of Daniel is addressing is not the people of the Sixth Century BCE. Scholars tell us it was actually speaking to people four hundred years later, in the Second Century BCE. In the Second Century, Judea

was in the control of a Greek king, ruling the eastern provinces representing roughly present-day Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. He called himself Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus made possession of the Torah a capital offense. Mothers who circumcised their babies were killed, along with their entire families! Altars to Greek gods were set up and animals prohibited to Jews were sacrificed on them. The idol of Olympian Zeus was placed on the altar of the Temple. The writer of Daniel was holding up the experience of the Jews during the awful time of Nebuchadnezzar as a sign of hope for Jews oppressed by an altogether different foreign king. He was telling them, “It’s awful, but it’s not the end. God has still to act.”

The parallels with the current situation in the middle east, though superficial in many ways, are also inescapable. There were forced conversions. There was

horrible violence. There was meddling by other powers who wanted to manipulate the situation in their favor. It all sounds so familiar and it is. A shadow of evil has overtaken our world, just as it has before. It's indisputably awful, but it is not the end. God has still to act. People of faith are called to believe that.

Our second reading is from Mark, and it presents the same sort of historical double shuffle I've described. Mark is viewed as the earliest Gospel, composed sometime around or just before the year 70 CE, perhaps forty years after Jesus' time. That's an important date because 70 CE is the year that the Roman general Titus destroyed the Second Temple. When the first readers of this Gospel read

Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

they weren't reading a prediction of a future event. It was the reality they were living. The Second Temple, the House of God, was destroyed by the Romans, just as the First Temple had been hundreds of years before. It would be hard to overstate the dimensions of this calamity. Jews to this day mourn the loss of both Temples on Tisha B'Av. If you or I had been of that culture in that time, the rubble which had once been the House of God could lead us to only one conclusion – it is over. The end times have come just as the images on the news cuts the heart from us in our present time..

Jesus was having none of that. “Yes, it's awful right now, but it is not the end”, He said.

Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take

place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.”

In the Sixth Century BCE, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed both Jerusalem and the Temple and hauled the people off to exile. Judah became a Babylonian province, putting an end to the independent Kingdom of Judah. It was awful, but it wasn't the end because a half century later, Cyrus of Persia, called the Lord's Messiah in our Bible, dispatched the neo-Babylonian empire and allowed the Jews to return home. This is the story told by the author of Daniel to those suffering under Antiochus. The author of Daniel wrote to remind them that, yes, it is awful, but it is not the end. It has happened before and God led His people through it. God will do so again.

Three hundred years later, the anonymous author of the Gospel of Mark spoke to people viewing the wreckage of the Temple and said the same thing: it is awful, but it is not the end. God has still to act. Now, we in the 21st Century read both accounts and we are called, just as the people of the first century, and those of the second century BCE were called, to embrace the certainty that yes, it is awful, but it is not the end. God has still to act.

It is above my pay grade to predict which would be the worse outcome – the appalling violence that would be necessary to defeat ISIL militarily or the dreadful prospect of ISIL winning. Hideous as either prospect is, it is not a unique situation. The attack on Paris is the same outrage as the tragedy of today's Syrian refugees, is the situation the Jews faced in the Sixth Century BCE as they were exiled from their homes to a strange land

ruled by a hostile people, is the tragedy borne by the Jews of the Second Century BCE at the hand of Antiochus, is the calamity suffered by the Jews under Roman rule. It is awful, but it's not the end. God has still to act.

You and I, and all who lift up the cross of Christ as the guiding star of our lives must bring to the world in which we live awareness of the brokenness which afflicts the world, and the proper response to this brokenness. We who follow the guiding star of the cross must inform the world how to oppose the evil that infects our world without becoming evil ourselves. That begins by trusting God when He tells us that it's awful, but it is not the end. God has still to act.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

The challenge of ISIL cannot be met by bombing the middle East into the stone age. Violence cannot defeat violence. French President Francois Hollande vowed to strike back without mercy, but Dr. King taught us:

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Pray for the people of Paris, and for the countries around the world who are now accepting Syrian refugees. Most of all, pray for healing of the broken hearts of those who have turned to such violence in pursuit of their own goals. Pray that they may be restored to lives within God's will, for they are very ill and in need of healing for the good of all of God's creation.

PRAY FOR THE FOOD.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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