

Apocalypse Now

It is rather amazing how many people are taken with end of the world scenarios.

Gospel lessons like the one we have today are fodder for best selling novels and movies like the Left Behind Series, which rake in millions of dollars and excite many more millions of fans.

In fact, end of the world scenarios also seem to underline in a very significant way the presidential election that finally and at long last ended early this week.

You didn't have to listen too hard to hear, throughout the Trump campaign, these same themes of blowing everything up, starting everything over from scratch, a desire for some kind of momentous reversal of the way things currently are: yet with almost no vision of what that reversal might look like.

It is striking that Mr Trump received over 80% of the white evangelical vote, notwithstanding his many statements and actions that seem to fly in the face of Christian morality.

Perhaps it is not a surprise that one of the outgrowths of this white evangelical Christianity is the creation of a kind of Rambo Jesus who comes back to engage in bloody justice on all kinds of people.

And when some think about apocalypse or the end times: that's the vision we get, Rambo Jesus.

That's how many interpret the violence Jesus sees coming

But this is a modern invention, and it is false.

It is not the faith of our fathers and mothers from long ago, nor is it the vision of Holy Scripture.

Throughout the gospels, whenever the disciples ask Jesus about when or how such things will occur, meaning, the end times, he reminds them that no one knows, not even Jesus himself, but only the Father.

Which should remind us of something...

This caution to leave such ultimate things to God is the same caution our first parents received in the garden, that warning to stay away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil....

Just as we are not equipped to handle the knowledge of good and evil so we are not equipped to handle knowledge of the end times.

And the proof of that is everywhere to be seen.

When we jump into the good vs evil debate, the outcome is always discord and anger, hate and even war; all with the smug self-satisfaction of being on the "right side."

This is the very attitude that fuels ISIS and all kinds of religious fundamentalists as well as any group that thinks it is on the side of complete rightness and justice — it's a dangerous place to be....

Just so when we decide to start figuring out when the end shall come or what it will look like or who will be saved, we make a mess of such efforts — just take a look at the nonsense spewed by things like the Left Behind Series, in which only a select few evangelical blondes are "saved" and the rest of humanity meets gruesome disaster.

But the truth is far removed from these fictions.

The entire story of the Bible is the story of God repeatedly and consistently and lovingly and unfailingly doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

When our parents evicted themselves from the garden, there is God, lovingly sewing clothes for them so they will be warm.

When Cain kills Abel, the first murder, and a murder of brother by brother, God puts God's own mark on the murderer Cain so that no one will harm him.

When the Hebrew people are enslaved, another murderer, Moses, is chosen by God to lead them to freedom.

And when the people prove they cannot become the full human beings that is always God's dream for us, Jesus comes, God with us, to show us how and what a complete human being looks like, to be an example to us of what it means to be creatures made in the image of God.

And yet in spite of the fact that Jesus is murdered at our hands, that unspeakable crime does not result in our eternal damnation, but, it results instead, through the grace of God, in heaven and earth being joined together once again..... the apple of God's eye.

Just so, the “end times” are not a time for Rambo Jesus to exact revenge on people not like us; the end times are God’s promise to make all things new; to gather all people together, a time of mercy, of forgiveness, of reconciliation.

This is why our second reading today is so important in understanding all these things.

The people of Thessalonica had their own Left Behind proponents.

Many in that community believed the end had already come, or was right around the corner; and so they gave up their jobs, stopped participating in community life, and expected the completion of all things within days or weeks or months.

And St Paul is having none of it.

He reminds them not to get all caught up in this kind of fascination, even though Paul too believed the end was near.

The job of a Christian, Paul reminds them, is to be about our business, being compassionate, engaging in kindness, working to keep food on the table and the lights turned on – because that’s OUR job....

..... while the job of fixing a time for the completion of all things?

That’s God’s job....!

So when Paul says that ‘anyone unwilling to work should not eat,’ he’s not saying “welfare is bad” or that “folks gotta pull themselves up by their own bootstraps,” he’s telling these new Christians that our job is to live our Christian lives here and now, and leave ultimate things, in faithful trust, to this God who continually does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

And I suppose that’s a lesson for us all in these days after what was indeed a momentous election.

Whether you greet these election results with joy or horror, we Christians are reminded yet again that our ultimate allegiance is not to a particular politician or party or nation, but to God; who has appointed Christ as the king of all creation.

We are the hands, the feet, the eyes and voice of Christ in the world, no matter our politics, therefore our faith calls us to be engaged in one another’s lives with humility, compassion and courage.

If we can do these things, one day at a time, then, with Blessed Julian of Norwich, we can be assured that all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well, for there is a force of love moving throughout the universe, that holds us fast, and will never let us go.

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