

Title: Hope that Endures

Subtitle: A realistic view of the endurance needed to live in hope.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/P5DafnVW3iw>

Today's Gospel is full of troubling images: wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines; and these are just the beginning of birth pangs. For many of us, it may be hard to hear these words.

A few years ago, I took a personality test called an Enneagram, and the results described my personality type as "The Enthusiast." In the book "The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery," the authors describe in detail what an Enthusiast looks like from the dark to the healthy side of their personal tendencies. In a nutshell, it depicted my personality as someone who "...tends to embody joy and boundless love for life. Most mornings, they burst into life like a kid who just found out it's a snow day." But with this positive disposition also comes the tendency to avoid stressful and negative encounters, which is not uncommon. Therefore, apocalyptic passages, like the one that is addressed in our lessons today, are those that I find particularly challenging yet also needed. For no matter how positive my disposition maybe, life has a way of shaking things up. And as I have looked back over my life, I had come to realize I have learned more from difficult times than I ever have when life was going my way. In fact, the trauma that I went through in my early years prepared me to one day become a hospice chaplain, which turned out to be one of the most satisfying experiences of my life. God didn't waste any of the things that I caused disappointment and anguish. In fact, the very things that I once hated have also been used to make me into the person I am today. So today, as we

approach our Gospel with its prophetic preview of distressing and troubling times, hopefully, we will all come as learners, willing to “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” the holy scriptures, so “that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope”¹ that is set before us. These texts may push us out of our comfort zones, but they are there for a needed and useful purpose, especially as we face difficult and distressing times.

Prophetic writers, like Daniel, who we read in our Old Testament lesson today, foretold of “a time of anguish.”² When he told about these things, he admitted that he “did not understand.” So he asked, “My Lord, what will the outcome of all this be?”³ All he was told was that God’s people would be “purified, made spotless, and refined”⁴ by such things. The Apostle John agrees, and he tells us that “All who have this hope, purifies themselves as he is pure.”⁵

With this in mind, we need to remember that hundreds of times from Genesis to Revelation, people of faith are told by God to understand their times but not to be afraid. In our Gospel today, Jesus said, “And when you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, **do not be troubled**; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet ...” And why should we not be troubled? Because our past, present, and future are all in God’s hands. Therefore, when life seems out of control and we are at the end of our rope, God is not at the end of his.

The Biblical record opens with the declaration, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” And it follows from such an intentional start that there will be some kind of fitting

¹ Book of Common Prayer, Collect for Proper 28, p. 236.

² Daniel 12:1

³ Daniel 12:8

⁴ Daniel 12:10

⁵ 1 John 3:3

conclusion. For a story to have a plot, it has to have an ending. For there to be meaning in a drama, there needs to be a climax. In the theater, it is not at all unusual for the author of the play to appear on the stage after the final curtain has come down. In the New Testament and to all Christian thought, this is a crucial concept. Without it, the Biblical vision of history would be incomplete. Therefore, a purposeful end of history is a central part of the Biblical message.

Our New Testament lesson from Hebrews gives us some practical advice as we consider these things. It says, Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”⁶

I will never forget how I felt right after 911. At first, my reaction was to let myself get paralyzed in front of the TV set, as the scenes were replayed over and over again. But I remember pushing myself away from the TV and calling on my church to pray. We needed each other in that hour, and not only did we come together within our own denomination, but we also got together with other churches, black and white, rich and poor. It didn't matter. And the unity that we discovered we had with one another was astounding.

And we resolved to be the church, the hands and feet of Christ to those in need. We wanted to take a role of responsible involvement and not allow ourselves to be passive bystanders when so many were in need.

⁶ Hebrews 10:23-25

These are difficult days, and in the midst of our distress, opportunities for service abound all around us. Is not this the real point Jesus was making in his famous parable of the Last Judgment? You may recall how all humanity is gathered before the throne of God and then separated into two groups—those who are accepted on his right and those who are rejected on his left. To those on the right, the judge says: “Come, you that are blessed of my Father, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was naked, and you gave me clothing, sick and in prison and you visited me.”⁷

Here is a shocking declaration, we can make a difference and be the lights of the world during a time when darkness seems to be overwhelming. So let’s be that light. Let’s embrace that hope, and let’s make a difference so that others may come “to know the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”⁸

⁷ Matthew 25:34-36

⁸ John 17:3