



The God of Disruptions

November 14, 2021: Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Second Sunday of Advent

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment, Rector

Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Oh Lord: take our minds and think through them; take our mouths and speak through them; take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.

This past Thursday I attended the Veteran's Day commemoration held across the street in Memorial Park. It lovely and moving. There were honor guards representing our armed forces, law enforcement and fire fighters. Among others, our state senator and state representative spoke, Becca Rausch and Denise Garlick, respectively; a senior from St. Sebastian's gave a speech; Select Board member Marcus Nelson read the proclamation declaring the Veteran's Day holiday in Needham. There were lots of Scouts, including our own Jack Carnahan and Kelvin Brown. I chatted with a number of parishioners. It was delightful.

And, it was somber. For me, weaving its way through all the speeches and proclamations, through the music and rituals, was the tragedy of combat, even for noble causes. The chaos of battle; the loss of life even in training; the devastating invisible, psychic scars as well as obvious, physical ones that so many veterans suffer; families and communities left in tatters. My mind went to the Gospel text that we just heard: "...You will hear of wars...for nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom..." I thought of the massive destruction that has occurred from war throughout human history... "Not one stone will be left here upon another."

That kind of destruction is the background of the Gospel of Mark. Composed in the era of the Roman Wars of 66-70AD, the Romans destroyed the Temple and burned much of Jerusalem to the ground. Our passage this morning is called the Little Apocalypse and refers to that destruction.

The Temple was the very center of Jewish identity, and an impressive structure. The 1st century historian Josephus writes that the stones of the retaining wall were 40 feet long. I've read that one of those stones weighs 300 tons. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Stone) Many of them are still visible in the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The platform upon which the Temple was built was twice as large as the Forum in Rome, and four times larger than the Acropolis in Athens. It was covered with so much gold that to look at the reflection in the sunlight could cause blindness. All of this—the very epicenter of Jewish tradition and identity—was reduced to rubble.

And this is what most people think of when they hear the word apocalypse: utter destruction, devastation so utter and so terrible that it means the end of a civilization. But that's not actually what apocalypse means. In the Greek, apocalypse literally means "uncover." It is the disclosure, or revelation, of what has been hidden.

And perhaps that is why Jesus seems less concerned about destruction, and more concerned about right understanding of what was happening, what is beyond the destruction. Mark's Gospel was meant to acknowledge the chaos, the turbulence of life, yet also to provide the seatbelt, the GPS, to maximize the focus on being faithful to Jesus. And yet the questions were unavoidable. Where is God? When will God show up to make things right? How will we know?



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While he walks with us in the confusion, heartache and transition of loss, never minimizing it, Jesus, instead of focusing on destruction and endings, directs us to the power, possibility and grace of new birth and new beginnings. Jesus invites us to behold those things that can never be destroyed.

Jesus teaches us that God's love can never be destroyed, or tamed, or contained by those things that can give us only temporary or illusory security – possessions, buildings, status, wealth, power. When things fall apart, by God's grace, there can be new beginnings that lead to life. The Holy Spirit leads us to deeper truths, deeper resilience, deeper love.

Friday and Saturday, I attended our Annual Diocesan Convention along with delegates Amy Sweeney and MaryAnn Ryan. We took part in workshops, business sessions, plenary sessions, worship, all of it remote on Zoom. Next week, I believe the three of us will share our experiences. On the Diocesan website (diomass.org) today or tomorrow, you can see many of the presentations and actions.

Friday night, we heard from Catherine Meeks, the executive director of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing in the Diocese of Atlanta. Born into slavery, Absalom Jones was the first Black American ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church, in 1802. One of Dr. Meeks' themes was the reality of disruption in our world. She pointed, of course, to the disruption of the pandemic, but also to increasingly frequent forest fires, floods, hurricanes, rising sea levels, as well as the apocalypse—which is to say the uncovering—of chronic and rising levels of economic inequality not just in the US, but around the globe, and the persistence of racial injustice.

She repeatedly posed this question and a follow up: *what is God's invitation to us amid the disruptions of our lives? How shall we respond to that invitation?* She shared what she described as the most powerful disruption in her life: as a young black woman, she realized that as a Christian, it was no longer acceptable for her to hate and distrust white people; in fact, she had to learn how to love us, even though she had precious little experience of white people as worthy of trust or love. But God had disrupted her life in a most inconvenient and vulnerable way. And thus, her life's work of racial reconciliation began. She realized that we can never be free if we believe some people are better than others, if we ascribe, consciously or unconsciously, to a hierarchy of human value.

Disruption can be painful, frightening, and discouraging. And yet, Jesus says, it is like giving birth. Advent invites us to see an invitation to follow Jesus in the disruptions of our lives and to do things differently, to shake loose the barnacles preventing us from moving freely into a future unknown yet vibrant, that is, as yet, just beyond the horizon, both as individuals and as the Body of Christ.



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I close with a bit of a poem from John O'Donohue, entitled, "A Morning Offering."

*May my mind come alive today
To the invisible geography
That invites me to new frontiers,
To break the dead shell of yesterdays,
To risk being disturbed and changed.*

*May I have the courage today
To live the life that I would love,
To postpone my dream no longer
But do at last what I came here for
And waste my heart on fear no more.*

Amen.