

**26 Pentecost**  
**November 17, 2024**  
**Proper 28, Year B**

**Sermon by Rev. Jim Dannals**

Herbert O'Driscoll invites us to see that, until very recently, Jerusalem existed for many people as a city more real in inner geography than outer geography. For generations, the world of the Bible was an inner country where we could walk and explore in a way that made it possible to walk more confidently and uprightly in the outer country where our lives were placed. Again and again, we hear faint echoes of that lost inner world; in literature, in vestigial phrases from the Bible in conversation, as geographical places people had rarely if ever visited, but that existed as totally real in sacred imagination.

The Jordan was a river in which their spirits bathed far more regularly than their bodies were immersed in the local river. One cannot help but suspect that, for many people today, the lands described in the stories of the Chronicles of Narnia and the Lord of the Rings are an unconscious substitute for those largely forgotten maps so familiar to past generations. These imaginary countries suggest that we are made to desire something more than any atlas or travelogue could give us. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, we “desire a better country.”

During my lifetime, the Episcopal Church has become a eucharistic community. And now that this rich sense of the Eucharist has been recaptured, it is even more necessary for us to realize that the scriptures are the other foundation on which our spiritual experience rests. If our life in Eucharist is to be enriched, so it must be in our biblical life. We have inherited these two great foundational gifts – **the meal and the story**.

For 500 years, Christians argued with one another over the importance of one over the other. Thanks be to God that, in our time, the argument has ended for millions of Christians; our vocation is to eat and drink the meal **and** to tell the story.

To tell the story, we must know it. To know the story we must go in search of it more intentionally than many of us have up until now. In the words of today's collect, we pray: *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...*

The reason this prayer gives us for going in search of the lost landscape of the Bible is expressed in one all-important word – Hope. The gold to be found in this biblical country is hope. It is one of the three most precious metals of the human spirit, the others being love and faith. Without hope the human spirit dies, human relationships fracture and societies decay.

Every year at this time, as we come to the end of one church year and the beginning of a new one, we read from the apocalyptic texts of the Bible. As we move toward the end of the church year and the end of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus speaks to his disciples about the end of the world as we know it... Notice that Jesus does not speak about the end of the world, but the end of the world as we know it. Apocalyptic does not mean destruction, ending, or strange events. Apocalyptic means “unveiling,” “revealing.” And what is being unveiled is violence. What is being unveiled is that violence is never redemptive.

Only forgiveness works. Forgiveness is what is real. Violence is an illusion, for violence never overcomes violence. Violence begets violence.

The Biblical story is about an alternative vision – a vision that understands that the end of the world as we know it is indeed good news. It is a story about new life – about the birth pangs of the new and living way, which is forgiveness, reconciliation, the unity of all things.

Walking by the magnificent temple, the grand edifice that was constructed by Herod to solidify his rule of Judea, Jesus’ disciples are much impressed. The temple was one of the great wonders of ancient architecture.

Yet Jesus surprises his disciples by predicting that this grand building is not eternal. It shall be destroyed, stone thrown down from stone, and demolished. We have come to expect bad news, not good news from end time stories. But, as always, the Word of the Lord is right on time. Apocalyptic texts seem to know what we need before we do. They comfort us by confronting us, forcing us to decide between reality and illusion. They ask us hard questions about where we put our trust.

“Do you see this great building? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” In Mark’s story, the disciples take a while to process this information. Later, as Jesus is sitting on the Mt. of Olives opposite the temple, a smaller delegation asks him privately, “When will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” The rest of Mark 13 is Jesus’ answer to these two questions.

Drawing on the traditional description of a false prophet as one who will lead many astray, Jesus anticipates the apparently perennial phenomenon of dramatic predictions of the

immediate end, designed to frighten God's people into whatever form of repentance the false prophet prefers.

Bad news sells: "if it bleeds, it leads," and bad news about the end times has been selling well for many centuries. And the bad news that sells is always rooted in fear. But the good news is always rooted in love. Fear is the root of violence. Love is the root of forgiveness.

The apocalyptic texts of the Bible are and always have been about hope – not the end of the world, but the end of the world as we know it. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says so powerfully - *where there is forgiveness there is no longer any offering for sin*. Where there is forgiveness, there is the end of the world as we know it. We stop trying to make it happen as we trust in the reconciling work of God.

As we eat the meal and tell the story, our task is to live in response to what God is doing in Christ. Our part in the action is trust. But we become impatiently self-important along the way and decide to improve matters with our own 2 cents worth. We try to add on to what God is doing instead of participating in what God is doing... We stop trusting...

The temple did not last. All of our striving, tragedy, illness and suffering will not last, economic prosperity will not last, economic collapse will not last, broken relationships will not last, revenge will not last, fear of those who are different will not last, enemies will not last, self-hatred will not last, hatred of others will not last. The world as we know it is coming to an end - for only God's love lasts. All of our hope rests in this good news.