

Year C, November 17, 2019
23 Pentecost (Proper 28)
Christ Church, Mexia

“You know it’s going to be a bad day when: You wake up in a hospital in traction, and your insurance agent tells you, ‘Your accident policy covers falling off the roof, but not hitting the ground.’”

The gospel reading this morning seems to be filled with a great deal of bad news – discouraging, bad-day kind of news: wars, earthquakes, famines, persecution... Jesus is seemingly foretelling the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem, which occurred in 70 A.D., and, to a lesser degree, the fate of the early Christians. So, what does it mean for us today? First, we should not ignore the fact that the Gospel of Luke was written about 20 years after the destruction of the Temple. Thus, the author of Luke knows all too well what happened and what is happening, and so would his readers. The word “Behold” that is in the King James Version of the Bible is removed from our translation; behold means to look upon or observe. Maybe then, we shouldn’t look at this so much as a specific prediction, but rather as a statement that things are going to be tough in life at times and we need to persevere.

Secondly, we should realize that many people over time, cultist and doomsday predictors primarily, have used this and related passages from the other gospels as a basis for their own claims that “the end times are near.” In fact, a person could make a good case today for such an eventuality: the wars and terrorism most evident since 9/11; the earthquakes in Haiti, New Zealand and many other places; the famines and hunger-related illnesses and death in Darfur and other places where people live in abject poverty; the forest fires plaguing our western states; global warming and many other environmental problems; the persecution of Christians in many parts of the world... These are “anxious times,” not unlike those of the 1st century. Of course, our parents and grandparents faced hard times, such as the World Wars and the Great Depression of the last century. These things are a part of life and have been since the time of Jesus. However, that doesn’t make us feel any less anxious today. We seem to be having a bad day, week, month, year... So back to my earlier question, what does this scripture offer us?

Tucked almost invisibly within the verses of doom and destruction is one short verse – 13, “This will give you an opportunity to testify” – followed by the admonition not to worry about what to say, for that will be given to you. And I suppose we should take a lot of solace from the latter part, because as Bishop Harrison outlined in her article in the *Texas Episcopalian* several years ago, studies by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life on “a number of aspects of religious life, including Americans’ knowledge of their own belief systems and denominations” is not flattering. In fact, they report that “atheists and agnostics know more about religion than the average American. Next are Jews, Mormons, evangelical Protestants, Catholics, and then

mainline Protestant denominations.” So we are far down the line, and how can we testify to that which we do not know?

But more importantly, how can we testify to the Good News when we, ourselves, are caught up in the anxious times when we are feeling discouraged and without hope when we believe that we are hurting as much or more than others? Harry Adams reminds us of the story of “Jean-Dominique Bauby, forty-five, a French journalist who had been editor-in-chief of the fashion magazine *Elle*, (and who had) suffered a stroke in December 1995. It left him unable to speak or move, although his mind was unaffected. The only part of his body still left under voluntary control was his left eyelid.

(Therefore,) Bauby learned to communicate with that eyelid. First, he learned a signal for ‘yes’ and another for ‘no.’ Then when a therapist recited or pointed to the letters in the French alphabet, he would blink when she reached the letter he wanted. In this way, he formed words, then sentences. Difficult though it was, he composed an entire book, *The Diving Suit and the Butterfly*, prior to his death on March 9, 1997. In its first week of publication, it sold 146,000 copies.

Bauby did what he could with what he had (in the final 14+ months of his life). To each of us the Lord has given some ability and some opportunity for service.” Surely we do not face circumstances as extreme as his. Surely we can find a way, as Christians, to share with others who desperately need hope, the good news of Jesus Christ. Because do not forget, Jesus ends this passage with the revelation that despite all the travails and betrayals, and the prediction that even though some will be put to death for believing in Him, “not a hair of (our) head will perish.” And by (our) endurance we will gain (our) souls.”

The trials of this life are temporary – the benefits of the Kingdom of God are forever if only we will accept God’s grace and share that gift with others, we can make a difference.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen