

“Now and Eternity” is a good way to describe this time from All Saints’ Sunday through Christ the King.

It is the end of the church year, when the scriptures point us to the end times –

- the coming of the Lord Jesus in power and glory –
- the consummation of this universe and
- the fulfillment of the new creation.

In just two weeks, we will begin the new church year with the season of Advent, with its message of hope and promise of peace.

But now, as we approach the end times, the message comes across more like doom and gloom, hellfire and brimstone.

- Wars
- Earthquakes
- Famines and plagues
- Dreadful disasters and warnings
- Unusual weather and cosmic disturbances
- Darkness and inescapable suffering

Mark’s gospel calls it tribulation.

Not what we’d like to hear on a Sunday morning when we are expecting to be lifted up and carried into our week with good news.

But don’t give up just yet. Things aren’t what they seem.

This is a particular manner of speaking called apocalyptic

– and as it is used in the biblical world,

it does not mean what our modern day culture has made it out to be.

Just as we hear and interpret poetry differently

than we hear and interpret political speech,

So the ancient people hearing the apocalyptic messages of

- Daniel and Ezekiel,
- Amos and Malachi,
- Jesus and John the seer of Revelation
- – would hear and interpret it differently from, say, the parables, the Psalms, or the beatitudes.

They would automatically know that such talk is not meant as a linear, chronological prediction of what will be,

as some have interpreted it to instill fear of damnation into believers.

**They would not interpret these messages as bad news at all, but as good news.**

They would interpret this language as the revelation it is – for that is the primary definition of apocalypse– revelation.

**In the bible, apocalyptic language reveals the ultimate will of God in the midst of a world in turmoil because of sin.**

It reveals what God finally intends for what he has made and loved.

**Apocalyptic language, therefore, is a message of hope to a people desperate for redemption.**

To be sure, there are warnings in apocalyptic speech  
– but the warnings are there to help people to claim the gracious promises of God.

They are there not to frighten believers, **but to show the way forward.**

If we are driving somewhere and come across a roadblock with a sign saying “Bridge out – Detour” – we are not afraid of it,  
but rather are thankful for it  
– thankful for the warning and directions to the way we want to go.

So it is with apocalyptic language – it reveals what God is up to and how we can participate in God’s eternal purposes.

Malachi the prophet distinguishes between

- those whom God has chosen
  - – those with whom the Lord has entered into a covenant of love
  - – those who fear the Lord, that is, who keep the terms of the covenant
- – and those with whom God has not entered into a covenant or who wantonly refuse to live within the covenant.

For the arrogant and evildoers, the hellfire and brimstone will be destructive and terrifying – they will have no escape.

But here is the revelation in Malachi's apocalyptic message from the Lord God:

*But for **you** who revere my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.*

Malachi's people would have heard this message as a promise to them of a messiah

– a righteous person who would bring light into their darkness and truth into the world of untruths and half-truths.

The burning fire and destroying heat of the Lord's coming was not for them – it was no threat to them

– For them was the promise of the dawn of a new day,  
new life,

healing for their broken spirits and weary souls.

We need to hear the apocalyptic messages of the Bible in the same way as those ancient people

– as words of hope and healing

in a world already touched by the darkness of evil  
and the lies and half-truths of Satan.

For apocalyptic is not so much about the future  
as it is about God who is acting now,  
in our present age, bringing hope and life into our world.

We know this because of Zacharias, father of John the Baptist who said:

*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High.  
For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
<sup>77</sup> to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of  
their sins.  
<sup>78</sup> Because of our God's tender mercy  
the dawn will break upon us from on high  
<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

And old Simeon, who when he saw Baby Jesus in the temple said:

*O Lord, my eyes have seen your salvation  
<sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel."*

**The Sun of Righteousness proclaimed by Malachi is none other than  
Jesus,**

- Son of God the Father,
- Son of Mary,
- who comes with healing for all who persevere in faith
- through the tribulation of this world and this life.

Listen to how Jesus brings truth into the darkness of the world.

When the disciples boast about material things

- even the splendor and wealth of God's house, the Temple
- Jesus puts up a roadblock by speaking the truth:

*It looks like this stronghold of faith will last forever. But appearances are deceiving.*

*All of this will be destroyed. Don't stake your life or faith on what will not last.*

*Terrible things will happen that are unthinkable,*

*Human life will capitulate to natural disaster,*

*the violence of war, and other threats.*

*Even you will be hated, betrayed, arrested, and executed because of my name.*

*But appearances can be deceiving.*

*Not a hair on your head will perish. Death will not be the end of you.*

The bright and glorious truth Jesus brings into our sin-darkened world is himself as the Resurrection and the Life

– the Sun of Righteousness whose own death fulfilled the covenant and whose resurrection established a new covenant that cannot be broken.

Jesus has come and sent his Holy Spirit into his people.

**The dawn from on high has risen – to heal us with his forgiveness and grace.**

No amount of doom and gloom

– no amount of distress in this life can harm us ultimately.

This is the good news of Jesus – and this is the hope announced by apocalyptic language in the Bible.

This is the hope we – God's people—bring into the world we live in,

so that those who are terrified by what is happening

might know the truth

and walk with us the way of peace in Jesus Christ.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen