

Talk About the End Time
The First Sunday in Advent
3 December 2023
Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California

Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7
I Corinthians 1:3-9
St. Mark 13:24-37

Introducing the Notion of the End Time

The understanding of the Eschaton, or the End Time, in the Hebrew Scriptures is rooted in the idea that YHWH created this world and cosmos and continues to intervene in these worlds and realities throughout history. The History of Salvation that begins in the Hebrew Scriptures is a telling of the End Time that God directs and instructs. There are two aspects to this intervention: judgment and salvation. Each are God's reaction to the acts of the people chosen by God and in a covenantal relationship with God. One can visit the eschatology (a fancy word for the talk about the End Time) of the Hebrew Scriptures most vividly in the prophets, especially Amos, Hosea, First Isaiah, and Jeremiah. These commented on the "end of things" vis a vie the Assyrian and Babylonian threats which were seen as a part of God's judgment of the people. The exilic and post-exilic prophets have another take on what is to come, Ezekiel, II Isaiah, and Zechariah along with others see an eschatology of salvation – the redemption of Israel.'

It needs to be noted that the influence of the eschatology of the Hebrew Scriptures was not the only influence to guide New Testament eschatology. Later Hebrew eschatology had been influenced by the end-time thought of Egypt, and that of Persia as well. That can be seen in the developing universalism of the latter Isaiahs, and others, as they saw not only Israel invited into God's family, but other peoples as well.

To seek out the eschatology of the New Testament one only needs to look at the teaching and theology that accompanies the idea of the Kingdom of God. The fact of the resurrection gives shape and form to the eschatological hopes of the New Testament writers, either the evangelists or the epistle writers. With the resurrection/ascension, our theological eyes turn to the idea of Parousia, Judgment and the End-of-the-Age. When Matthew and Luke tie their infancy narratives to models from the Hebrew Scriptures, they fashion the arch of eschatology that extends from the words spoken at Creation to the end of time. These are some thoughts to think about as we begin this period of waiting to hear and see God's intervention in our time.

Third Isaiah's View:

This reading is actually a part of a much longer pericope that begins with [63:7](#) and ends with the last verse of our reading. The New American Bible titles this pericope as

"Prayer for the Return of God's Favor". The material leading up to our reading recounts God's gracious deeds to Israel and the relationship of God with a chosen people. The remembrance of ancient deeds is juxtaposed with the faithlessness of the people. An example: "Where is the one who brought up out of the sea the shepherd of his flock? Where is the one who placed in their midst his holy spirit, who guided Moses by the hand, with his glorious arm?"

The initial verse of our reading is actually from Isaiah 63:19b. The whole verse reads: "Too long have we been like those you do not rule, on whom your name is not invoked. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you." And then the third of the Isaiah's supplies images that match his prayer for God's return to Israel, "As when brushwood is set ablaze..." Some commentators see this pericope is being very much like many of the psalms, a communal complaint. What we have in this reading is portions of a complaint that included: a) remembrance of God's mercy (63:7-14), b) confession (63:15-19a), c) a call for divine intervention (63:19b-64:6), and d) a final plea (64:7-11). The faithful people look at their sometime faithlessness, and ask God to come and to not be angry. It is a perfect reading for this period of expectation, for this season of Advent which looks forward to the End Time, Christ's coming again. From these hopes come the familiar prayer – *Maranatha!* Come, Lord Jesus, come.

St. Paul's view:

So then, how does one wait for some kind of redemption in the midst of troubling times. That certainly is a question that is forefront in our own time, but it also obtained as Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. The city of Corinth was a diverse, powerful, economic powerhouse with all the troubles and difficulties that accompany such success. So, Paul, in an effort to encourage Corinthian Christians, has them become aware not only of their worldly assets, but of their spiritual gifts as well. He does this in a prayer of thanksgiving, in which he acknowledges that God has enriched these people in Christ. The Christ on whom they are waiting is evident in their speech and thought. The comfort that he gives them is their blamelessness – their condition that will be on the day of Christ's coming. In his eschatology, Paul sees God coming into history and calling all sorts and conditions of people into the fellowship held in Jesus Christ. That's what Advent is all about.

Saint Mark's Advent:

As a way of preparing ourselves to hear St. Mark's Advent Vision, "The Coming of the Son of Man", we might want to hear what comes before this vision. In this text Jesus describes an apocalypse that will come before his coming again:

"When you see the beginning of the End Time, then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and a person on a housetop must not go down or enter to get anything out of his house, and a person in a field must not return to get his cloak. Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days. Pray that this does not happen in winter. For those times will have tribulation such as has not been since the beginning of God's creation until now, nor ever will be."

Note especially the tribulations that are documented there: pregnant women and nursing mothers, days such as has not been since the beginning, the shortened days. The comments outline an urgent situation that demands immediate attention. There are signs that are the reversal of creation, with a darkened sun and moon, stars falling, the powers of heaven in chaos. This reversal of creation signals a new creation and a new beginning. It is at this Time, that the new beginning is made real in the coming of the Son of Man. And here we need to turn to Daniel.

*"As the visions during the night continued, I saw coming with the clouds of heaven.
One like a son of man.²
When he reached the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him,
He received dominion, splendor, and kingship.
all nations, peoples and tongues will serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion.
that shall not pass away,
his kingship, one that shall not be destroyed."¹⁴*

This human being, God's agent, is in Mark, not an unknown entity, but Jesus himself. The "coming in the clouds" reminds us of the accompanying presence at the Exodus, or of the cloud that descended upon the Tabernacle. Psalm 68 is a good reference in which we see God as the one "riding upon the clouds". Now we see creation in a new light, with angels, the winds, and time itself as attendant upon the Coming One.

Inserted at this point is a Parable of the Fig Tree. The fig is a deciduous tree, that loses its leaves and goes through an annual cycle of growth and fruit bearing. It is a good example of the seasons of the year. Look at the fig and know at what point in the year you are. We are to take those observances of the times and seasons to know, as Jesus says, "that he is near". The sense of time is also underscored in the comment on the Word of God and its eternity.

Finally, there is an encouragement to be watchful. Jesus offers multiple examples of such watchfulness – the man traveling abroad, and the servants, and the gatekeeper – all need to be watchful. But there is hope in our time. Yesterday we elected a new Bishop Coadjutor, Austin K. Rios, who will become the Ninth Bishop of California. His words to us at the electoral convention spoke of new visions and new hopes to come. So as we await his coming, we await Christ's coming as well. Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus, Come!