

Your Redemption Is Drawing Near

Jesus drops a lot on us in today's Gospel. Signs of the end times. Stuff we'd rather not think about, to be candid, because some of the things He mentions are happening. We very naturally fear the idea of the end of the world. I have vivid memories of being really disturbed by the idea when I was about five years old, wondering if today is going to be the day. But the thing is, fear clouds our vision. Fear scrambles our thinking. Fear can cause us to miss the point that Jesus is driving at. Let's not miss it today.

So, Jesus gives us this list of things like war, natural disaster and other catastrophes. But please notice that he does not specify a sequence. He does not say when A lines up with B and C, then that's when everything will start to jump. And it's not like he is saying, these are the indicators that will let you know that now it is time to start behaving yourself and get back to work because the boss is coming. Many of the things he references were happening then. Every era and every generation has been forced to deal with terrifying events that cause people to "faint with fear and foreboding." So what's the point? Jesus is teaching us about the fundamental posture of faith. *He is teaching us the fundamental posture of faith.*

What do I mean by that? Well first, let's think about the posture of fear. What is the body language of a fearful person? Isn't it "fight or flight"? Or maybe as Jesus says, it is to faint. Or to run and hide. What is the posture of frustration? I've seen it so many times; you have too. It is the shoulders hunched, face downcast, body slumping. I've sat with people who are so burdened that they won't even make eye contact, they are curved in by sadness or guilt or pain. We know this posture. If you've been around for any amount of time, you've been in this posture. When we are horrified by the things we see in the world we naturally start to assume this posture.

But this is what Jesus wants his followers to do: “Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Jesus wants his people—he wants you and me—to assume the posture of faith. Standing and raising your head is a defiant act. It is a choice to move from one posture to another. It is a choice to look up while the world is falling down. The posture of faith expresses the expectation that God will be faithful to help.

The great conductor Leonard Bernstein once said: “This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.” Jesus’ words are not so different. You can imagine him saying, “When others faint from fear and foreboding of what is happening in the world, I want you to love more intensely, serve more beautifully, worship more devotedly than ever before.”

This helps describe the posture of faith Jesus wants us to have. And we need it so badly, because we live in a time full of significant events that are clearly not signs of redemption. We have to mourn when bombs go off and homes are washed away and gunmen open fire and lives are shattered. Our hearts ache for something better. Something perfect. And to that desire, Jesus says, It’s Coming. Your redemption is drawing near. And Jesus’ word is truth. So we abandon the posture of fear and stand in the posture of faith. And a funny thing happens when you stand in that posture. You can see up and out and around yourself. You can see who needs to be loved more intensely and served more beautifully as you worship Father, Son and Spirit more devotedly. The posture of faith makes you ready to be useful when things seem to be falling apart.

But here’s the question: how do you move from one posture to another? It’s simple. You need to pin all your hope on Jesus. These hymn stanzas, translated by John Wesley, say it better than I ever could:

Jesus, Thy blood and righteous my beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in that great day, cleansed and redeemed, no debt to pay;
For by your cross absolved I am from sin and guilt, from fear and shame.

When from the dust of death I rise to claim my mansion in the skies,
This then shall be my only plea: Christ Jesus lived and died for me.

The Apostle John also writes, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4: 18). And Jesus' love for you is perfect love. It is a love that has erased your record of sins. It is a love that is stronger than death. It is a love that has secured a resurrected life for you. Rest in that love. Be confident in it. Take a bold stand. Lift up your head, because your redemption is drawing near, and it is closer than it has ever been.