

Filled with the Spirit, February 20, 2022, St. Timothy, Burnaby

Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Psalm 37,1-12,41-42; 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50; Luke 6:27-38

Prayer

The world is doomed. As Paul says, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Our days are numbered.

Just in case we needed reminding of how fragile things are—although, I think the last two years of a global pandemic have reminded us that life is precious, delicate, and short—we have been seeing the way that things are unfolding in our nation’s capital as protestors are removed from the streets of Ottawa. We saw the bridges and borders taken hostage by protestors with a political agenda. And it seems that Europe is on the verge of a major armed conflict, between Russia and Ukraine.

You probably don’t need me to remind you, but just in case, get your affairs in order. Prepare for the end. Say your prayers, ask for forgiveness, and tell your loved ones that you love them. Often.

The world is doomed. This place is coming to an end. The return of Jesus is coming.

...and I say that as something of new conclusion that I have arrived at.

I’ve had a very busy few weeks, but somehow, when an unknown caller caught me at my desk in the church this week, I had a very long conversation with him. I probably *shouldn’t* have spared the time that I did, but in some ways I’m glad I did because it helped me come to the conclusion that I opened with: the world is doomed.

The gentleman claimed to be doing research for a dissertation. I think he was trying to convert me to his religion. It was a long conversation, but one of the main points he kept coming back to was the return of Jesus. Was it going to be a *physical* return? Or a *spiritual* return. Might he have come back *already*? What did the Bible say? How did I read it.

In the conversation, I told him that I believed that Jesus was coming back. *And* that Jesus was alive, still, somewhere and somehow, *physically*. As far as what Jesus’ return would look like, I didn’t say anything too definitively. There has been lots of speculation and I for one am not going to put a date on the expected return. But I was clear about *one* thing: He hasn’t come back yet. We are still waiting.

But I did allow for the possibility that the New Heaven and the New Earth that are promised in the book of Revelation might be “spiritual” ideas, rather than physical ideas. That the return of Jesus might be something more incremental, over a long period of time, and the “new heaven” and “new earth” referred to something that would come about through a period of renewal. Of gradual steps towards something more like heaven on earth. That the kingdom of God would *emerge* from the world that we live in.

But now I know that’s wrong.

This world is doomed.

And I have reached that conclusion as much from reading political commentary and watching news footage of the Ottawa situation as I have from reading this week’s scriptures. The kingdom of God is not emerging gradually. This world is doomed. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Flesh and blood is powerful. We are all made of flesh. We all have blood flowing through our veins. We are all human. Creatures. Animals, to put it crudely. And we are driven by animal desires. And we *strive* to *temper* those animal desires, with differing degrees of effectiveness throughout our lives.

We can look at the reading from Genesis and see Joseph, finally face-to-face with his brothers all these years later. Now *he* is the one in a position of power. He is the one who holds the fate of all of them in his hand. And, I have no doubt, that in his *flesh and blood* he knew just how he could exact his revenge on them. They were in his clutches. They were at his mercy. And yet, despite all the misery he suffered, despite years of slavery, and prison, and ill-treatment because of their envious act, he overcame his animal nature and, not only allowed them to live, but provided for them and their families. They did not deserve that.

Even an animal knows about fairness. About how to respond to being abused. Or hurt. Or mistreated.

But Jesus appeals to his disciples to rise above their animal nature. To resist the urge to strike back. To endure the punishment dealt out by others, turning the other cheek. Offering our shirt, as well as our jacket.

Love those who mistreat you, Jesus says. What credit is it to you if you love those who love you? How is that praiseworthy? Everybody does that. It's easy. But loving those who *hurt* you? Those who harm you? Those who seek to hurt you and your families?

And today the concept of "enemies" is much more real than it usually is. It is easier to imagine that we really *do* have enemies, today. People that are actively seeking to harm us, and wish to do harm to us and our families, than it has been for...my whole life, anyway. An "enemy" is not just an abstract concept, but with the divisions that have been drawn in our world, the people on the "other side" are not mere adversaries, but all-too-often, actual enemies. Jesus wants me to *love* them? To pray for their health? For their well-being? That's a nice idea, Jesus, but it doesn't fly in the real world. That's not realistic. That's not even *healthy*.

And I'm not just talking about the cognitive dissonance of denying one's own suffering; the idea of *toxic positivity* which I've preached about before. If you are in a situation where someone is *actively harming you*, then it is not healthy for you to try to be "positive" about it. To move on with your life. To "turn the other cheek" and continue accepting the abuse, hoping it will stop.

This idea of Jesus' sermon on the plain has caused all kinds of harm. Women, often (though not exclusively) have been instructed to endure the abuse of their partner. Victims of emotional (and many other kinds of abuse) have been convinced that it is *their* responsibility to remain in situations where they will continue to be abused. And, turning again to Joseph, his story has been used as an example of God bringing out redemption, supernaturally, to even the most abused persons in the world. God found a way to make the plan work for the betterment of all—therefore *my* actions are inconsequential. My abuse, my mistreatment of you, of others, of entire people groups can all be ignored because God's plan will prevail, anyway.

This is wrong. This is harmful. This kind of thinking has done tremendous harm to numerous people. This kind of thinking has been used to protect oppressors and enable abusers to continue in their abuse while silencing their victims.

So no, This simply will not do. There is no way to move from *this*, gradually, to a further and deeper expression of God's kingdom on earth. The world is doomed. The end is coming.

...but that is also the point that Paul is making. We are people of flesh and blood. We *try* to be "better people". We try to "do more good than evil". But we fail. Constantly. *Because* we are only flesh and blood. We are just human beings. We are weak. We are flesh. Limited. Mortal. Sinners, like our father Adam.

But that's not the end of our story.

And that is why Jesus is such an important figure. *Not* because he taught us how we might *finally* do the things we really want to do—to overcome our fleshly limitations. No. Jesus taught us how to *die*. Jesus showed us that flesh and blood won't inherit the kingdom of God. That the world is doomed.

But Jesus also showed us how to have new life.

In giving his own life up for others, Jesus became the archetype for all human beings, for all flesh, born in the shadow of Adam, the first human. Jesus became the way *out* of the rut we are stuck in. Jesus became for us the *second* Adam, the man of spirit, rather than the man of dust. The man of heaven, not earth. Jesus became the *path* for us to new life. In dying to ourselves, we are like the seeds, planted in the ground. In dying they produce much new fruit—and the product of the ground is an entirely new *type* of being than the seed that was sown. The body that is raised is a "spiritual" body, or a *spirit-filled* body. It has some connection to the fleshly body that died, but it is no longer flesh and blood. It is no longer "perishable".

This world is going to end. The perishable flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But the imperishable can. Those who have been raised to *new life* can inherit the kingdom of God.

This world is doomed. Flesh and blood will not remain. But the spirit will. And we can be filled with the spirit when we die to the desires of our flesh and blood and are raised to new life, filled with the spirit. May it be so with us. Amen.