



Monday Musing: April 20th, 2026 Apocalypticism...

If you're on Facebook, following the pictures I post of our hikes, you'll have seen the comment that ...well... we misplaced the path last week. We weren't lost. We knew where we were and where we needed to be. It was just that the path we were following was not clear and to continue might take us not to where we expected to go. When in the forest, the rule is if you think you're lost, rather misplaced, you stop, listen, look, and not proceed till you sort it all out. If you don't do this, you risk going in a really wrong direction.

So, we walked back to a familiar tree in a small clearing. We stopped, listened, looked around, got our bearings, and thought through where we were. There were indicators: the ridge, the slope, the types of trees, the sounds of distant traffic, and our familiarity with this forest.

Within a few minutes, even without the clear path, or anything marked on the map, we figured it out. It wasn't too long till I found a familiar old path and the old apple tree that always tells us this is the way out. It is like an anchor in the forest, the main tree that points back to where we began. I was thinking this whole experience connected with reading I'm doing on the person of Jesus and what he taught. Ya...you might think this is a big leap, but it is where my head went. You know that's me. This old apple tree was my *God is love* anchor. The path was how we understand, and can misunderstand, Jesus' teachings out of his time in the world.

To understand the person of Jesus and his teachings, in his time, we must understand his time, that is, 2000 years ago, the Jewish and Roman world into which Jesus was born and lived. Having a grasp of that context, like the forest, puts his teachings into a very specific worldview. This can be a challenge because we have nearly 2000 years of church history, tradition and doctrine behind us, that has shaped our beliefs; therefore, we carry these into the scriptures when we read them. Instead of reading our present beliefs back into the scripture, what if we stop, listen, look and get our bearings from the context of the ancient world, and then see what path back might lead to ours? Sounds crazy right? We begin with the Torah, the teachings of God, that Jesus knew.

As scholars point out, according to the scriptures, God gave the Israelites the Torah *after* they had been saved from Egyptian slavery. The Torah was a guide for living with God and each other, and not a way to earn salvation. If people failed to follow, repentance and atoning sacrifices were made and God would forgive. The Torah taught God's love and forgiveness as understood in their time and place and history.

Two hundred years before Jesus, a religious perspective emerged that influenced the Jews including John the Baptist and Jesus. It is called 'apocalypticism.' Around the time of the Maccabean Revolt in 160s BC, the question of suffering was explained in that it was not because of refusing to keep the Torah, but suffering came from a power opposed to God and God's people. The apocalyptic view (meaning revealed) was that there was a conflict between good and evil and that a less powerful entity than God was wreaking havoc on the earth. This power came to be known as Satan, or the Devil, with various other names. It was further believed God would soon intervene to overpower this force through a judgement on all and it was coming soon. Those who remained faithful to God would be destined for God's kingdom on earth, a new paradise. Those who were judged against God would be cast out and annihilated. For those already dead when judgement came, who were on God's side, they would be resurrected. Bottom line, this was all going to happen very soon, led by one from heaven, like a son of man, so now was the time to turn back to God and commit to following God's ways.

Apocalypticism was a very Jewish understanding found in the literature of the time including the gospels. "Repent and believe the good news," that is, as Jesus said, "The kingdom was near." (Mark 9:1) But it didn't happen soon. Apocalypticism shaped the writings of the bible just as the failure of it to happen also shaped the authors' writings.

There's more to this story, just as there's always more to our hiking stories. Finding one's bearings sure does provide a new view forward – in the forest and the scriptures.

Prayer

Holy One, giver of guidance, of Torah, of Love, and forgiveness, may we find our bearings with and within your story, and those of our faith story, then and now. Amen.

Scripture this Week

Acts 2:42-47	The believers share everything in common.
Psalms 23	God is my shepherd.
I Peter 2:19-25	Christ's example in suffering.
John 10:1-10	Jesus the good shepherd and the gate.

TR Question (theological reflection)

Sharing all things in common, as the first believers are said to have done, generally makes people hesitant today. Some folk see such sharing as communist or socialist. What do you think? Why?

May God guide you with loving peace, as you explore the forest, and the scriptures,
Rev. Dr. Deb Foster, Minister, St. Andrew's United in Markham
905-294-0351, minister@standrewsmarkham.com