

“Shout with joy and
lift up your voice
rejoicing with song.” AMEN!

A nervous passenger
called the flight attendant over
for a question about safety before
the plane took off.

He asked, “Does this plane have airbags on it?”

The flight attendant smiled and replied,
“Yes, as a matter of fact we do!
Two congressional members
just got on board!” :-)

On this second to the last Sunday of
the church calendar year, we come upon
the familiar apocalyptic texts.

The words from Jesus and
the prophet Malachi are sobering
to say the least.

They aren't very cheery!

We, like each generation before us,
consider the prophetic words about

the end of times (or end of the world)
to be addressed to the current reader.

And now it is now our turn to think they pertain
to what is happening today.

And while it is important for us
to talk about the mind-blowing
words from Jesus.

And while it is wise of us to consider
Malachi's wisdom and prophecy about
the day that is surely coming.

And it is crucial that we discuss Paul's letter
to the Thessalonians noting his exhortation
to do what is right.

We need to do all of that in the midst of
the dark cloud of despair that seems to pervade
in this day.

For it is hard to not be hopeless after
delayed climate actions, more
disappointing election results, and a
future of backbiting in our society.

But, remember that it is also wise
to see that these events do not necessarily
mean the end is upon us.

That we can hear the words from Jesus
“to not be terrified for the end will
not occur immediately.”

And that even the words from Malachi’s
“burning like an oven” day
are hopeful words to those who
have fought the good fight and
have tried to be faithful
to God’s name and
sought healing from the Lord.

The hopeful words from the prophet promises
that those who have been evil on purpose and
the ones who are arrogant over others will
get their just desserts.

The “airbags,” in other words,
will be deflated. (Pause)

These prophetic words of hope for
the oppressed are here to
remind us of our work.

“Our command,” as Paul put it, is
to keep away from idleness and to not
grow weary in doing what is right.

We must know that the word “idleness” here
does not mean rest or taking time to rejuvenate.

We need those times!

“Idleness” here refers to being disorderly or
doing things that hurt the
health connection of the community.

The ones who cause problems through
hurtful disorderly conduct must refrain
from doing this, Paul encouraged.

You see, the Christian community in Paul’s day
thought Jesus was coming very soon.

Some even believed that Jesus was already back
and the end of times and the New Jerusalem
was about to be restored,
so they just stopped doing anything.

They just quit.

These able-bodied people became difficult
burdens on the community in both
physical and psychological ways.

They stopped doing what needed to be done
and ceased following Jesus’ command

for endurance.

So his statement, “Anyone unwilling to work should not eat,” didn’t mean that the community should neglect the poor or ignore people who are unable to work or even to stop helping the people who were suffering.

It was encouragement for all people to participate in the building of community according to individual abilities.

No one should freeload and all people can do work according to their physical and mental abilities.

Everyone can contribute something.

Otherwise, Paul communicated, the community health will deteriorate. (Pause)

Each of us have burdens that keep us awake at night.

And while we are encouraged to remain hopeful, these burdens remind us that comfort and ease is not guaranteed.

Some might say nothing in life is guaranteed,
but that's not quite true, is it?

Comfort and ease are not guaranteed but
the guarantee is that God will get us through.

One way or another, God will get us through.

This is our hope... a firm foundation in
doubt and sorrow.

When Jesus foretold the destruction of
the temple it was right on the heels of what
he saw happen in the temple.

At the start of chapter 21 in Luke we read
about Jesus looking up and watching all
the rich people being showy with the way
they made offerings.

And they got their attention.
Everyone watched them show off!

Then, we are told that Jesus saw a poor widow
drop in a couple of copper coins.

He saw her and he noticed,
no one else did.

They ignored the widow's offering and instead saw,
in today's reading, with wonder and amazement
the beautiful stones and gifts dedicated
to God in the temple decor.

And Jesus saw the blindness of people and
he saw our willingness to not see people,
and instead, marvel over architectural
wonders and splendid stones.

You understand the difference.

Who will endure?

Most of us, if honest, would just as soon
skip over texts like the ones we have
assigned today.

To tell you the truth, it is a lot more comforting
to listen to false prophets promise
“pie in the sky, by and by.”
That is to say, go straight to comfort and ease,
and have assured confidence that the only
reason to live is for a reward that will
come one day.

When we do this kind of living though
we miss seeing God in the widow, orphaned,
and oppressed.

We become people who look
for the chance to say,
“I told you so!”

Or live for the applause, and gawk at polished stones.

But you...
you are the hope for the world.

AMEN!