

I do not often read the AARP newsletter cover to cover, but with the most recent issue I got close.

The issue begins with headlines announcing that we are in historic times that will impact every aspect of our daily lives. The headlines refer to the Covid-19 pandemic and all the ways it has turned our daily lives upside down. The death of George Floyd and the demonstrations that followed had not yet occurred, nor had the landmark decision by the Supreme Court. Never before in our lifetime has a cascade of events impacted so deeply or broadly the very foundations of our daily lives.

The Bible readings for this morning are particularly well suited to the times we are living in. In Jeremiah's lifetime Jerusalem was destroyed and the people carried off into captivity in Babylon for 75 years. Shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection, Jerusalem was demolished again, this time by the Romans, and Israel ceased to exist as a nation until 1948. So the tumultuous context of our readings for this morning resonates deeply with the volatile context of our own time.

In our Gospel passage from St Luke, Jesus is speaking to the crowds about what he sees as a conflagration about to blow apart the social order of that time. The pervasive injustice of the structures of their society was reaching a tipping point, and Jesus saw that it would inevitably explode, and it did in 64 A.D. Jerusalem and Palestine had been occupied and exploited at the time by the Roman legions. Many among the Jewish elite collaborated with the Romans and were paid handsomely for their collaboration, while the common people were taxed and robbed by the authorities to the point of destitution. Jesus' frequent attacks on the rich in his teachings were not attacks on wealth as such, but on the ways the wealth was obtained and secured through collaboration with systems and structures that robbed the common people and rewarded those who were willing to go along with the corruption of the occupiers.

The suffering of the people had reached such a level that there were frequent uprisings and riots. I believe Jesus was saying to the authorities and the privileged people of that time: *Your lives are built on the quicksand of corruption and injustice, and floods and storms are coming that will not leave one stone on another.*

Jesus said to the people: *You know how to predict the weather, but you do not understand the seasons of God's justice.*

It is a common view that we are living through an historic time, that we will think of our lives as before-and-after 2020, when life as we had known it and expected it to continue was profoundly altered and in many ways turned upside down. Who among us does not from time to time ask ourselves, "What is going on? When will life return to normal?" And then we realize that much about the present will become the normal for a long time to come.

The foundational understanding that was being revealed in Jesus' teaching and actions was more than the assurance that corrupt regimes will inevitably crumble and implode. What was being revealed in the continued unfolding of Jesus' life and death and resurrection, which he spoke of as his baptism, was that the power of love and justice are stronger than death itself. Jesus' nonviolent resistance to the domination of Rome and the power of his example, which lived on after his death and resurrection in the example of his followers, revealed the working of God in history to transform the workings of human forces and intentions.

We are becoming familiar with the statement that the arc of history bends toward justice, that through all the upheavals and suffering in human life and history, there is an emerging, unshakable ground of dignity and worth in all of life that cannot ultimately be silenced or stopped.

In a sermon at our National Cathedral several weeks ago, Pulitzer Prize winning historian Jon Meachem suggested that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus led him to believe that, ultimately, history moves toward meaning and goodness, not nihilism or absurdity.

At historic moments in our own history, leaders have led us to see that in our darkest hours, we are called to hope and to believe that there are choices before us for life and for good, for justice and for peace. We are called upon to seize and act upon those choices and work for justice and for peace.

One of the starkest of those dark moments when a leader called the nation to see God's providence doing its mysterious work was near the end of the Civil War when Abraham Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, said that the blood being shed and the treasure being consumed in the Civil War were payment for the years of agony and toil of the slaves upon whose backs the nation had built its wealth.* I believe we are called to see the turbulent times in which we live as a crucible in which the imperfections and corruptions in our collective and personal lives are being broken open and hopefully transformed. For all the pain and grief that is all around us, we can make this moment a time for purifying our intentions and of reclaiming our deepest values and commitments as a people to the dignity of every human being. We can renew our dedication to protect the natural world, a world that many believe is pushing back in Covid-19 against our abuse and exploitation.

I find Jesus' question to his people, "Why do you not understand what is going on?" speaking to us in our time of chaos and upheaval. I am also realizing anew how important it is to me to be in relationships and in conversation with people. Conversations like those we have shared on Sunday mornings in [Conversations That Matter](#).

It is urgent that we study and think deeply and that we talk honestly and respectfully with each other as we seek to understand what is happening, what it means and what it asks of us. We need urgently to talk with each other and to listen together for the movement of God's mysterious work of healing and transformation. The promise of the Gospel is that as we gather in the name of Jesus, seeking to discern the rhythms and seasons of God's work among us, He is in our midst.

* 'Fondly do we hope -- fervently do we pray -- that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.' "

Second Inaugural Address