

Every new church year begins with apocalypse. Apocalyptic literature is hard to interpret. Apocalyptic means the unveiling of the world that lies behind the world we can see with our eyes. It’s a revelation that tells about the transition from this age to the next. The transition is always rough. Everything breaks loose. Nations go to war, civilians run for cover.

There are signs in the sky above, panic on the earth beneath, stars falling, people dying of fright—it’s a whole drum roll of disaster. When your own kingdom has had a good year, you are not particularly looking for the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom is good news for people whose lives are bad news. Everyone else has quit scanning the horizon.

Read Luke 21:25-36

It is difficult enough to say anything at all about the future, especially if one has no power to implement what one predicts. How much more difficult to say anything about the ultimate future of the whole world!

This, however, did not deter Luke from predicting “. . .this generation (meaning his contemporaries) most certainly will not pass away until all these things occur.” These things—the shaking of the powers of heaven, the coming of the Son of Man, the advent of the Kingdom of God—did not, however, occur in Luke’s generation.

Perhaps Luke can be forgiven given his experience. The final edit of his gospel took place after Rome set siege to Jerusalem in April of 70 CE. The Romans allowed Passover pilgrims to enter the city but refused to let them leave, strategically depleting food and water supplies within Jerusalem.

Titus placed four Roman Legions, 60,000 legionaries, around Jerusalem. In August, on the same day the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem more than five-hundred years earlier, Titus gave the Tenth Legion the order to attack. What followed was the kind of experience that gives rise to apocalyptic literature.

Passover pilgrims trapped for months in the city had been reduced to starvation and plagued by disease, fanaticism, and derangement. Gangs roamed in search of food. Prisoners and defectors were crucified. When soldiers discovered some residents swallowed their treasures in hope of retrieving them later, they were gutted by the legionaries.

Six thousand women and children huddled together in expectation of a *miraculous deliverance* were burned alive. The surviving priests were executed in the Temple. The Temple walls were torn down, and the great stones filled the valley and the city. The end of the city, the end of the Temple, it turns out was not the end of the world.

Franz Rosenzweig, Jewish theologian and philosopher who died in 1929, wrote: “The world is not yet finished. Laughing and weeping are still to be found in it. The tears have not yet been wiped away from every eye. The past can be recounted, but the future can only be grasped by means of anticipation. The future is experienced only in expectation.”

What do we expect? Facing an uncertain future makes us anxious, fearful, grumpy. On Friday, faced with uncertainty, the stock market took a dive. Faced with an uncertain future, some of

Luke's readers, like some of us in this ever evolving pandemic, turned to alcohol for solace. If we are going to die tomorrow, might as well eat, drink and be merry today. Which is all fine and good until you wake with a hangover and regrets!

From the time of Jeremiah to the time of Jesus to modern times, the end of the world was understood to come from God. The world would end if and when God acted to end the world. Modern times has given us the expectation that the annihilation of the world will be caused by human beings rather than by God.

This annihilation has been made possible by scientific and technological developments. Albert Einstein wrote in 1946, "The power of the atom that has been unleashed has changed everything except the way we think. We need an essentially new kind of thinking if humanity is to survive."

A new kind of thinking! Many Christians expect, as did the Jewish women and children sheltering in the Temple in the summer of 70 CE, a miraculous deliverance. This expectation is little more than fatalism masquerading as hope.

The expectation of a miraculous deliverance may strike the Christians who hold it as very logical in the tradition in which they find themselves sitting, but the only trouble is that the tradition in which they sit is a boat that has slipped its moorings and is now floating off in mid-ocean a thousand miles away from the facts. (Thomas Merton)

His young son woke him in the night. "How many stars did you say there are?" He couldn't be angry. Even yanked from sleep, he was glad his son was still stargazing. "Multiply every grain of sand on Earth by the number of trees. On hundred octillion: one with twenty-nine zeros."

"How many have planets?" asked the boy. "Most probably have a least one. Many have several. The Milky Way alone might have nine billion Earth-like planets in their stars' habitable zones. Add the dozens of other galaxies in the Local Group and you get an outrageous size of emptiness."

To expect a miraculous deliverance coming in a cloud with power and great glory is to engage in magical thinking.

Jurgen Moltmann offers a new way of thinking. He believes there is no hope without fear, not a fear that paralyzes us but one that sensitizes us to the truth of real dangers. Without such a fear we will be waylaid by catastrophes. Fear wakes us up and keeps us alert.

Fear is the reverse side of hope, though hope is not the reverse side of fear. Hope for someone can make us afraid for them, but we do not derive any hope from mere anxiety. Fear lends hope fore-sight. Courage without foresight makes people stupid. Foresight without courage makes them cowardly.

When Paul prays for the strengthening of our hearts, he is praying for courage. In addition to courage, Paul prays for an increase of love. Why? Love is the womb of faith and hope. This love must be overflowing, because it is not limited to those like us, but is love *for all*.

For all! This may be the most significant new thinking we can embrace. Given the dangers we now face, no one of us is going to be saved unless all of us are saved.