

“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Our gospel this morning is scary. Absolutely frightening.

Nation will rise against nation. Kingdom against kingdom.

There will be earthquakes and plagues and famines.

Dreadful portents and great signs in the heavens.

The temple itself will be thrown down!

As we enter into this time of Advent, this time of waiting in the unknown, these are the readings we get.

Great trouble in all the world. Tribulation.

We have come through ordinary time, the great green growing time, the time of learning to walk daily following Jesus in each one of our ordinary days.

We’ve come up upon All Saints Day, the veil thinning, feeling a connection with those who have gone before.

And now? Injustice. War. Dreadful signs.

And it’s not just trouble “out there.” It’s not just war “out there” somewhere. This is trouble that touches us in our bodies.

Famines. Plagues. Betrayal. Arrest. Persecution.

These are troubles that affect us, not just in our minds.

Not just in our hearts.

But in our bodies.

We see injustice in the world. We see it on the news. We see hatred and violence.

Sometimes we feel that we can do something about it.

Sometimes we may feel helpless.

Luke is writing this as a word of hope to people who have been through great trouble. Luke was writing several decades after Jesus walked the earth. In Luke's time, the temple Jesus had visited was destroyed in AD 70.

The center of the Jewish world had been destroyed, desecrated, torn down.

Can you imagine if the center of what you hold dear was torn apart?

Perhaps a great cathedral, or even this building?

An act of violence to scatter the people connected to this center

To scatter the faithful, to disempower them, to chase them into hiding.

To keep them from coming together as a people.

But Luke is writing this scary apocalyptic text as a word of hope.

"By your endurance you will gain your souls."

Something big is happening. Something massive. Something we know not what.

Last Sunday, the appointed Hebrew Bible reading was from Haggai, "For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations." You may remember this text from Handel's Messiah. From "Thus Saith the Lord."

In the midst of these scary texts, we are promised that God is doing something.

God is not absent.

God will shake all nations.

Something is happening.

But we don't see it yet.

As the people in the first century experienced, God was doing something, and they knew not what.

Endure.

Endure in your bodies.

Endure through the anxieties of the news you hear.

Endure through the scary signs.

Endure through betrayals, famines, persecutions.

God is not absent. God will shake all nations.

And God will shake us.

In Advent, we look forward to "God with us," God showing up, in a body.

Our Hebrew Bible reading for today begins "I am creating a new heavens and a new earth."

Something new is happening. We know not what.

"By your endurance you will gain your souls."

We aren't just enduring individually. Luke was writing to a community. Isaiah was writing to a community. Haggai was writing to a community.

"By your endurance"-- that "your" is better translated "all y'all."

By your endurance as a community, as a people, you will get through.

You will get through the troubles and trials.

You will see the new heavens and new earth that God is creating.

You will see that surely it is God who saves *us*.

In the canticle sung by the choir, I think the “me” is more like a “royal me.” The one singing is the community. Surely it is God who saves me, the people of God in this place.

And the people of God in all the world.

And so what do we do?

We show up.

We keep showing up.

We band together as a community, as a people.

We endure, all together.

We bring all of our gifts, all of our resources.

We grow together and weave together our lives.

When I’m facing scary news, either of myself or some thing in the world, I can either try to tough it out on my own

Or I can band together with others. One cord on its own easily breaks, but a cord of many strands is not easily broken.

We can endure. And as a people, we will gain our soul.