

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Nov 14th 2013

Paraphrasing Charles Dickens, we can say, “these are the best of times, these are the worst of times.”

Where once we felt so secure, so wealthy, so advanced, so strong, so gifted, and so blessed. And now so many of us feel threatened, so fearful, so sorrowful, and so struggling; it is a mystery and a challenge. Many are asking: How can this be? What happened? Where is our God who has been with us for so long? Where do we turn, who do we trust, and what do we do? What do we tell our children and our young adults?

In the gospel, Luke reports that Jesus, in answer to the Pharisees who wanted to know “when the reign of God would appear,” answered, “You cannot tell by careful watching when the reign of God will come. Neither is it a matter of reporting that it is ‘here’ or ‘there.’ The reign of God is already in your midst.” There seems to be a hint of steadiness and permanence, even calmness in Jesus’ reply. God is, has been, and continues to be in our midst. We need not go frantically running after sightings. In tragedies we hear about around the world, it can seem God has hidden his face.

On one hand the gospel appears to be saying, there will be no wake up call, although we may wish there were. “A time will come when you will long to see one day of the Son of Man but will not see it.” On the other hand, the gospel goes on to say, “The Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning that flashes from one end of the sky to the other.” Luke seems to be telling us that we won’t possibly miss him when he comes. His presence is undeniable.

For me the gospel challenge is how have I missed the undeniable, constant, exploding presence of the Spirit in my life and all around me. Now I am forced to look deep within myself at all the false sightings that attract my attention. The God I encounter is an aching, loving parental God, a God weeping over the worldwide tragedies of all of his children, a God holding the mourning spouses, children, parents, and friends of victims of all races, creeds, and nationalities. As trivial as it may sound, this gospel challenges me to live life more fully. It challenges me to be more alert to the steady undeniable presence and challenge of the Spirit in my life, my community, my country, and in the world community. The lightning flashes of the movement of the Spirit are striking worldwide.

“May the worship of each one here bring salvation to all.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.”

Joan Blandin Howard