

Pentecost 25, Proper 28, Yr B
 11-18-12
 All Saints Episcopal Church

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."--Mark 13: 1-2

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Amen.

Good Morning! Let me begin by saying in the interest of full disclosure that I am not a big fan of apocalyptic literature that is not in the Bible. And it is only because of what I have learned about the writings in the Bible that enable me to accept what's there.

Morgan Wooten is a former high school basketball coach who coached at a Catholic high school in Maryland for 56 years. His teams won 1274 games while losing only 192 times. He has the most wins as a head coach in the history of basketball on any level. He is considered by everyone who knows him to be one of the great ones. Well, everyone except his grandson.

Wooten is one of only three high school coaches in the Basketball Hall of Fame. At his induction, he told a story about his grandson's first day of school. The teacher asked Nick, "What's your favorite sport?" "Baseball," he said.

The teacher knew who Nick's grandfather was. She was surprised. "Not basketball?" Nick said, "Nope. I don't know anybody who knows anything about basketball."

The teacher was even more surprised, "But Nick, a lot of people think your Grandfather Wooten knows a lot about basketball. Nick snorted and laughed, "Oh no! He doesn't know anything about basketball. I go to all his games and he never gets to play."

Sometimes we see God the way Nick saw his grandfather. Because we see the game of life going on and have a hard time seeing the hand of God anywhere in it, we

think, "God doesn't know anything about it," or, "God doesn't care anything about it," or, "God can't do anything about it," because, after all, we never see God get in the game.

Our Scripture readings today talk about having faith in a world gone mad, of seeing God's hand in the whirlwind of life around us. The readings from Daniel and Mark are both examples of apocalyptic literature. Though many writers use these kinds of words to try to make predictions about the future and to frighten people in the present, this is not what these Bible passages are about. They are intended to give us hope and steadfastness of faith when we go through hard times and when God seems to be very far away.

The book of Daniel was written at a time when the Hebrew people and the Jewish faith were in a tough spot. They were in exile, they were oppressed, they were persecuted by the king, Antiochus Epiphanes, who forbade the practice of key elements of the Jewish religion, slaughtered Jewish people and desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem by sacrificing a pig on the altar. It was a scary time there in the present. Daniel was not written as a prediction of what might happen hundreds or thousands of years later; it was written to give hope to a people who had lost all hope, to rejuvenate the faith of those who were losing touch with God.

Likewise, Mark's Gospel was written to the early Christians, a community of faith that was also in a tough spot, about thirty years after the death of Jesus. The Jewish revolt against the Romans began in 66 C.E. In the year 70 the Roman legions not only captured and sacked Jerusalem, they also marched in to the Temple itself and the Holy of Holies in its center, carrying off its treasures. These early Christians were fearful of the present and hesitant about the future. These words were written to give them hope and faith in the God of both present and future time.

Both of these communities were like Morgan Wooten's grandson. They saw the activity in front of them, but they couldn't see the hand of the one running the show; and so they were afraid, they were anxious, they were losing hope.

In this 21st century, it is often hard to have hope. People are afraid, they are anxious. A pall of fear and anxiety seems, many times, to have descended upon us. We seem to be losing hope because of economic bad times, because of climate change (whether you believe in it or not), because of who's in charge, because of

wars and rumors of wars. Writers and TV preachers fuel the fire of this fear by preaching the apocalypse - some even hopeful that Israel will destroy its enemies so that the End Time will come as soon as possible. They must skip reading the end of this chapter 13 in Mark, which says, *'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.'*

Shouldn't those words alone give us hope? We don't need to know when the end will come. We only need to know that God is with us always, in every place and in every time.

Do any of you remember the Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks skit called The 2000 Year Old Man? The routine was born in the 1960s when the two comedians began improvising at a party to entertain their friends. Reiner plays a TV reporter and Brooks plays, well, a 2000 year old man.

(Please imagine the Old Man with a thick Yiddish accent)

Reporter: "Well, did you worship God in your village?"

Old Man: "No, at first we worshipped this guy in our village named Phil."

Reporter: "You worshipped a guy named Phil? Why?"

Old Man: "Well, he was bigger than us, and faster than us, and he was mean, and he could hurt you; break your arm or leg right in two; so we worshipped Phil."

Reporter: "I see. Did you have any prayers in this religion?"

Old Man: "Yeah. Want to hear one? - PLEASE PHIL NO! PLEASE PHIL NO!"

Reporter: "Okay. When did you stop worshipping Phil?"

Old Man: "Well, one day we were having a religious festival. Phil was chasing us and we were praying. (PLEASE PHIL NO! PLEASE PHIL NO!) And suddenly a thunderstorm came up and a bolt of lightning struck and killed Phil. We all gathered around and stared at Phil awhile and then we realized: THERE'S SOMETHING BIGGER THAN PHIL.

This is the ultimate message of apocalyptic literature: there's something bigger than Phil, there's something bigger than the bad stuff that happens in our lives. And that something bigger is God. That something bigger is faith that God's tomorrow will overcome our yesterdays and today's. That something bigger is the faith that God is indeed very much in the game. God is with us in all our pain and

sorrow, our suffering and disappointment. God is bigger, much bigger than all those things that frighten and haunt us.

There's an interesting line in our Hebrews lesson, verse 24: "*And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.*" Usually the word *provoke* is used in a negative sense; as in "*Honest Officer, I didn't want to hit him, but he, he provoked me!*" but here it is used positively, as encouragement, as stirring up, as prodding and pushing and being active in love.

We are called into a world full of scared, lonely, hurting people, and we are called to provoke one another into acts of love and works of mercy, into commitments to compassion, into doing the right thing for all the right reasons. We are called to be the hand of God in the world, touching all with the gentle and healing caress of divine love.

Amen.