

## The End of the “World”

The First Sunday of Advent, Year C, RCL. Luke 21:25-36. December 2, 2018. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

It's the first Sunday in Advent, New Year's Day for the Church year. In our year of Sunday scripture readings, we start reading from the Gospel according to Luke. And what have we got today? The Lukan apocalypse: Luke's version of Jesus' description of the upheavals of the end of the age.

And in current news we also have yet another catastrophe, a big earthquake in Alaska...again. They happen there on a fairly regular basis because of the geology of that area.

From a Christian point of view, the fact that natural and human-caused catastrophes happen *at all*, and cause such trouble for us, is the problem. The problem is not which catastrophe, it's catastrophe itself. Whether you're washed out to sea by a tsunami, burned up in a wildfire, or hit by shrapnel in a civil war, it's still major suffering in a world turned upside down.

Now in apocalyptic literature, of which the Lucan apocalypse is an example, it can look like God designed these events (or at least some of them) to get our attention. But although it is clear that we are supposed to be paying attention—otherwise why talk about it?—it is better to see catastrophes, in apocalyptic talk and anywhere else, as *not* caused by God.

Catastrophes are not designed to be God's trumpet; that would make him the author of evil. But they *are* indications of what is out of whack and needs to be fixed. Natural processes and human nature are damaged and distorted. They have the destructive, painful, ruinous and discouraging effects they have because of the abuse of free will, operating on the human and cosmic levels. God has shared free agency with his creation; this has not always turned out well, and, though that is not God's fault, he takes active responsibility for dealing with it.

When catastrophes are mentioned in apocalyptic talk, they are signs that things are bad and that God has plans to intervene to heal and rescue the creation he loves. That's just basic Christian theology. Bad stuff is always going on; it's not God's will that it happens and God doesn't like it. God has intervened decisively in the corrupt and catastrophic world through the birth, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and eventually the mess (as I like to call it) will be cleaned up. God is not pleased by suffering and he wants to fix it.

So when people say (as they often do) things have gotten so bad the end of the world must be coming, I can only say: Yes—but that's the way it's been all day, every day since sin, death and evil took hold in creation. The end of sin, death and evil (the “world” in the negative sense of that word) is definitely coming. Our good and loving God is on the job. Look for the signs of his joyful power and align yourselves with it. Help clean up the mess. Do your best not to make the mess worse. Ask for God's help; he will give it. Trust him for the ultimate outcome.