

## **What does it mean to be saved?**

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

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Texts: Isaiah 12:1-6, Malachi 4:1-2a, Luke 21:5-19

### **Isaiah 12:1-6**

O God, we thank you: for though you were angry with us,  
your anger turned away, and you comforted us.

Surely God is our salvation; we will trust, and will not be afraid,  
for God is our strength and our might; God has become our salvation.

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Holy One.

Call on God's name; make known God's deeds among the nations;  
proclaim the exalted name of the Righteous One.

Sing praises to God, who has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth.

Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

### **Malachi 4:1-2a**

See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble;  
the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root  
nor branch. But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its  
wings.

**Luke 21:5-19** *We have journeyed with Jesus and his disciples toward Jerusalem, where he will face the final test—which will not be the end of the story. Knowing the situation, what do you make of the words of warning in this “mini-apocalypse?”*

When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, Jesus said, ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’ They asked him, ‘Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?’ And he said, ‘Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and, “The time is near!” Do not go after them.

‘When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.’ Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

‘But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.’

Our readings today can sound scary. We call this kind of writing “apocalyptic.” People often use the word apocalypse to describe the violent end of the world. But apocalypse also means to reveal an urgent truth: as the beginning of COVID exposed stark inequities in our society. Climate talks this week in Egypt lay bare the alarming truth of environmental tipping points. What they tell us is that we may well be facing



an end to life as we know it. Jesus took such threats seriously. So should we. But apocalyptic warnings tend to make people run for cover, preferably with some heavy fortifications and plenty of ammunition, to keep their friends safe and their so-called enemies out. Not only has this never worked, but it’s exactly the opposite of what Jesus intended and taught. No, his followers are to go unarmed and unafraid into the heart of the beast. We’re not even supposed to devise persuasive arguments; God will provide your words. God will provide your safety. God will provide your salvation. But what does it mean to be saved?



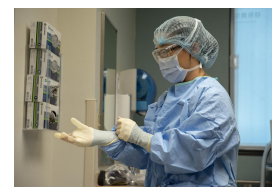
While you think about that, let me tell you about my week. On Tuesday, I boldly ventured into a part of town totally new to me and knocked on the doors of strangers to remind them to vote. Believe me, I was trusting God to provide the words. I didn’t, by the way, tell them *who* to vote for. Among the people I met: two young men who were excited about the solar panels they were installing on their homes. That was encouraging! Then there was Tom. An American flag flew proudly over his front door but - “Sorry, can’t vote - I’m Canadian!”



Some of the women spoke more personally. Like Ifrah, a lovely woman in a beautiful hijab. She stressed how important voting was to her, but told me she was new to the neighborhood. While we figured out her polling place and a plan for childcare, she told me that she had come to the US when she was six. Already at that tender age she had witnessed and experienced unspeakable things in her home country, Somalia. In Rochester, she’s worked as a translator for new immigrants to help welcome them, but, she said, “I feel like I don’t belong here, in this neighborhood. People act like they think I’m a terrorist.” We talked for a while. I wanted to hug her, but I wasn’t sure it was culturally appropriate. But when I started to leave, she reached out to me. We put our arms around each other like sisters. I hope she makes some new friends. *(Not really her picture)*



I hope she meets Kelly, who lives just down the street. Kelly and her husband were just going out to vote on his lunch break. She, too, had witnessed terrible things in the past 2 ½ years: she’s a traveling ICU nurse who cares for COVID patients. Although things have grown better, I could see the pain in her eyes as she recalled the lonely deaths and the hard conversations with families. Before I left, she asked, “Are there people who don’t have a way to vote? I can give them rides. Who can I talk to to volunteer?” We hugged, too. *(Not her picture, either)*



Thursday was a little different. I visited Ron in the hospital. He was his calm, positive self, despite having just gone through surgery. He wasn't alone, though. His sister-in-law, Jeanie, had flown in from Vermont to see him through his recovery. She was upbeat and cheerful, a burst of sunshine in the dim hospital room. She talked about her church back home, and mentioned how their pastor always honored the Indigenous people who had occupied that land. Yes! I thought.



I missed Judy Robb's wonderful talk on The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (maybe she'll present it here someday!), but I heard another one by a Minneapolis peacemaker named Will. He teaches gang members new language, with words like "risk assessment," "de-escalation," "non-retaliation," and "unarmed civilian protection," then brings them into high-risk schools where they not only provide security for the kids but befriend and mentor them. The brothers, he says, learn about "peace and passion, not fear and force." Will teaches them that humans are not natural killers. "We just need to come to the table." Isn't that what representatives of 190 countries have been doing all week in Egypt at COP 27, too?

And then I heard an interview with Ross Gay, poet, gardener, and author of the book *Inciting Joy*. He says, "Joy is the light that emanates from us when we help each other carry our sorrows." I love that definition. Does it help us understand what it means to be saved? Do you see a pattern unfolding here, of mutual support, kindness, compassion?



So what does it mean to be saved? It doesn't mean holing up in your private bunker until the smoke has cleared. It's not an individual evacuation plan to another world. And it doesn't mean that God will miraculously swoop you out of harm's way in this one. On the contrary: sometimes Jesus calls us into harm's way. But we don't go there alone, and we aren't saved alone. Salvation is like the word salve, a healing balm that works its way into us when applied directly. Salvation starts to work its way into us when we show up to work together. As always, God works divine miracles through human means. And although I believe non-violent solutions are best, I honor all those who put themselves in the line of fire. I honor the parents and wives and siblings who kissed them goodbye, not knowing if they would return; and I grieve with the children who grew up without a father or a mother.

Jesus calls us in our time: We don't need to be afraid, but we do need to be realistic; we need to take apocalyptic threats seriously. We need to be motivated. We need to be ready. We need to be faithful. We can offer our whole selves to the work, not just our money or time. Apocalyptic visions may be scary, for sure. But God's promise is real: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking." And if we can't do it on our own behalf, can we do it for the sake of the children?



As our meditation today, please take a minute listen to their voices: [Dream Peace](#)

The Armistice of 1918 ended the horrendous slaughter of World War I, called THE WAR TO END ALL WARS. When the Armistice was signed, exuberant JOY broke out around the world. For many years bells rang 11 times at that 11th hour of the 11th day on the 11th month. Then it slowly faded away, especially in the U.S. Now we ring bells again, many bells, many places, 11 times, at that sacred moment. With a moment of silence, we remember the soldiers and civilians killed in warfare in every country, and we commit to work and pray for peace until this assault on the Will of the Creator of us all, is finally over.

Please pray with me:

For those who have given of themselves

I give thanks, and pray that I too may be so giving.

For those who have risked I give thanks,

and pray that I too may be so courageous.

For those who have sacrificed I give thanks,

and pray that I too may live not for myself

but for others, not just for my own,

my family, my kind, my country—but for all others, in gratitude for all—

strangers, all—who have given so much for me;

because we are all woven in one web of care, one body, one life. Amen

### **Prayers**

Bread of the world in mercy broken, wine of the soul in mercy shed, by whom the words of life were spoken, and in whose death our sins are dead: You are the words in our witness, the current in our connections, the evidence that healing is real, hugs are possible. Look with us on our broken world, and work salvation in us as we work together.

Eternal One, you alone know what is ultimately bad or good, and what the final victory will be. Let us never stop caring for those who put others before themselves to do what they believe is right, for those who risk everything for the sake of their children's dreams.

As the harvest continues, may we find there is enough and to spare for all the people of the earth. Let us take seriously famine, drought, the destruction of farmland, and the threat of whole nations drowning as people come to the table to work toward equity in solutions.

Still, we know that we can't love humanity in general if we fail to love and care for the individuals you have placed in our lives, and so with tenderness we remember those dearest to us. Awaken our hearts to the love of Christ that knows no boundaries, but knows us each by name. In his name we pray as he taught us, Our Father and Mother in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and let us not be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen



