



still waters

home church studies

Psalm 80.1-7, 17-19 [Worship]

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth 2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us! 3 Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. 4 O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? 5 You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. 6 You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. 7 Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

17 But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. 18 Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name. 19 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Consider:

by Kari Jo Verhulst

Jesus' harrowing picture of darkened skies and falling stars is a jarring start to Advent. In the preceding verses of Mark 13, Jesus, with unsettling resignation, warns of the unparalleled suffering that must come before the "Son of Man" comes to "gather his elect...from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (Mark 13:27).

We understandably resist Jesus' insistence that his coming means certain wars and rumors of wars. Given the way such apocalyptic words have been abused to over-interpret history and abdicate human agency, many of us avoid such texts altogether. But along with such resistance is our desire that the peaceable kingdom would come peaceably, winning over all opposing forces with winsome charm. But this betrays how deeply the forces of resistance lie and how firmly they intend to hold on to their power.

The apocalyptic sensibility present in this text possesses a deep conviction that God is working out salvation, regardless of how horrible and hopeless the present world might appear. Within the history of Israel, this theological stance emerged as a vital corrective to the tradition that emphasized that God acts in history. Kings and their parties readily abused this view, claiming God's blessing upon their decisions and propaganda, and leaving their people little, if any, theological room to criticize.

It is no accident that apocalyptic literature, and its reminder that God acts in trans-historical and supernatural ways, finds favor among people who are socially and politically under siege. The fierceness of beasts and the violence of the cosmic and natural disasters give language and image to how intensely terrible the world can be. Advent waiting is an invitation to solidarity with all that groans under the birth pangs of the new creation.

[Scripture]

Mark 13.24-37

"But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "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. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."