

The End of the Beginning

Scriptures: Acts 5: 27-32, 39(b)-42 Revelation 1: 4-8 John 20: 19-31

Summary: The Resurrection of Jesus was not the beginning of the End; rather, it was the end of the Beginning.

“Why do the birds keep on singing? Why does the sun continue to shine? Don’t they know it’s the end of the world? It ended when you said, “Good bye.”

There have been many sermons on the book of Revelation or any of the other prophetic warnings or parables that deal with what people call “the end times.” In every age (in fact, in every single year) there are wars and rumors of war, and there are all manner of natural and unnatural catastrophes or remarkable phenomena which make sages nod wisely and remark, “Yes, the End of the World draws nigh.”

Since we are not all that far from April Fool’s Day, let me tell you the story of a practical joke which a pair of Jewish boys decided to pull on one of the elder, Hassidic, ultra-conservative rabbis. The boys knew that this man was expecting the Messiah and that, when the Messiah came to end the world and usher in the Kingdom of God, a shofar (a ram’s horn) would sound from heaven.

So, early one morning, the boys crept up to the side of the rabbi's house, climbed the wall carrying a hollowed ram's horn, and waited on his roof for the dawn. At first light, they blew the horn with all their might, waking the entire neighborhood and startling a deliveryman whose cart was being pulled by his donkey. The rabbi leaned out his window clad in his nightshirt. The boys fell to the roof in convulsive giggles, expecting to see the rabbi rush out to greet the Messiah.

However, as the rabbi looked out his window, he saw the deliveryman angrily whipping his donkey, which had balked at the noise and was refusing to budge. Sadly, he closed the window and went back to bed, muttering: "If men still act this way, the Messiah has not come."

Psalm 121:8 is one of my favorite blessings. I use it often during funerals: "the Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever." And, this is my point: *there is no going out that is not also a coming in.* Or: there is no end which is not also a beginning.

Do you want to prepare for the End of the World? Don't go digging a huge root cellar bomb shelter and line it with canned goods and distilled water. It would be better to prepare for the beginning of the next world so you will be no stranger when it arrives! God began the world, assigned people to represent the Divine Will to Creation, and saw Divine plans

frustrated by the estrangement sin brought: estrangement from God and estrangement from the natural world, which they exploited and whipped.

All Creation writhes in the transitional birth pains of a mother waiting for the birth of the children of God. Earth waits, not for the child of God (that was Jesus), but for the children (that's us). I offer you a different song than the one I began with: "For the nighttime shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright, and Christ's great kingdom shall come on Earth, the kingdom of love and light."

As Jesus taught, that kingdom is not far from you. It is in the Word you have heard and believed. Blessed are they who have not seen it yet; yet who still believe and live in that world. If we live as if in the coming world and the ram's horn sounds, the rabbi will look out and run from his house, for the Messiah will have come. He will be with us. So let it be, Amen!