Today we enter the world of what we call the Apocalyptic. It’s a very common and highly used way of thinking, in fact I think today we are dominated by Apocalyptic thinking. What we mean by the apocalypse is a catastrophic event that ends the world, or devastates the world. So we’re talking about the last days, or the end times. And what an apocalyptic world view does is predict the catastrophe and what the outcome will be. It all comes down. How shall we think about this?

I think this apocalyptic world view lies underneath all of us to some degree. It’s like today we all have this feeling that things are spiraling out of the control and something very bad is about to happen. Our last president over and over said, we’re losing our country. We’re losing our way of life. And that is exactly what Jesus says today in our Gospel when he says that temple will come down. What he is saying to these disciples is that they will lose their country. It’s coming down. All these terrible things are going to happen, or are already happening. And it’s this stress that stokes the apocalyptic fire. A pandemic that changes things, and they will never be the same. And it’s out of this experience that we all have at various points in our life that the Apocalyptic world view is formed and created. And our present is just one of those times of high stress and change and anxiety.

There are two books of the Bible that are Apocalyptic. The first is from our first lesson today, it’s the book of Daniel and the second is the book of Revelation. Both reveal one way to handle the Apocalypse. Our Gospel lesson and Jesus takes a different approach. But our first lesson today is just the classic formulation of what happens to a people under great stress and fear of the future. I’ll read some of it again to try to set the stage, because this is the classic outcome of the Apocalyptic.

“There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

Ok, so we live in stressful times, and it looks like our world as we have known it may be coming to an end. So what’s the message here from Daniel? Yeah, you will be delivered from it. What is going to happen to everyone else isn’t going to happen to you. You will saved if you will from all of this terrible thing that is about to happen.

And how are you saved from this apocalypse, this catastrophe? By being one of the righteous. See how common and ordinary the Apocalyptic is? There are the good people, and then there are the bad people. And the good people are going to be spared and the bad people will have to suffer. The righteous get everlasting life and the rest will get shame and contempt. Sound familiar about our future? Hey, the future looks bad. But guess what? I’ll be delivered from it. What happens to everyone else won’t happen to me.

We all remember the story perhaps of Daniel in the Lions Den. That’s the model for the apocalyptic world view. Daniel refuses to worship the kings false God. So here comes the persecution and that’s a huge part of any apocalyptic theme. We’re being persecuted for our faith. And so Daniel gets thrown into a fiery furnace and then cast to the Lions. But like Daniel and his friends, if we have God, we can sail right through the catastrophe and come out without a scratch. And those bad people? Won’t come out so good for them. Hard to resist buying in isn’t it? That’s pretty attractive. That will sell.

And indeed it does. This is big business today. I remember 20 years ago or so they had the left behind series. Anyone remember that? That’s all apocalyptic. And the idea is that Jesus comes back and there is one scripture in the bible about one being taken and another left. Boom. Left behind. And the left behind have to face all of this terrible suffering that the good people don’t have to do. So they’ll tell you how to be on the right side of things to avoid all the pain. It sells and preachers who do this well make millions of dollars, talking about the mark of the beast and the prophetic signs, it’s the same old stuff that goes around and around, the stuff we used to talk about in the 5th grade at recess. When I was a kid the mark of the beast was a certain stamp that was on Nestle’s products. That’s the Satanic stamp. Sound the alarm! Now it’s a chip that they can inject into your head, or a way to program a vaccine to subject you to the new world order, or just one thing after the next that is the sign and mark of this horrible apocalypse, this catastrophe that’s coming. Designed to rile you up. And then they’ll give you the secret to avoiding the pain.

So it’s interesting indeed to think about our Gospel lesson for today. Because when Jesus deals with the apocalypse its just the opposite. Jesus and his disciples are strolling through the temple courtyard and one disciple at least is very impressed by the building and how big it is. Now the temple represented their. I’ve said it before, but it needs to be said, for us I think it would be much more like the Capital Bldg. in Washington D.C. Or the way the jets fly over the football stadium right after the national anthem. Pretty impressive marks of the connection between God and country and patriotism. That’s it, that’s what this disciple is experiencing I think he as he walks through this incredible place. It’s inspiring, it’s patriotic. It bears ultimate loyalty. Surely you must know this moving sense of being impressed by Lincoln memorial. That’s it.

But now comes the apocalypse. Jesus says it’s all coming down. It will all be destroyed. Not one stone will be left. And the temple did fall, it’s a historical fact. You can see what’s left it today, it’s called with wailing wall in Jerusalem, one of the most famous places in the world. It was catastrophic. But it need not be so removed from our reality. The apocalypse happens all over, all the time. Maybe it’s a divorce. This week I heard about a family in Courtland with 3 kids who lost both of their parents to Covid-19 in the last couple of months. That’s an apocalypse. All over the country we once knew, the way of life we loved is going away, what we counted on seems uncertain. And if Jesus is right about it, it’s just the beginning. Wars and rumors of wars, nation again nation, earthquakes, famines. It’s interesting that disciples ask when? When will end times be? What are the signs?

Well what does Jesus say about all of this? How does Jesus coach us to deal with the coming catastrophe? The first thing he says is do not be lead astray, and that many will seek to lead you astray when it comes to end times. And then he defines what being led astray is. What will these people do who lead you astray. They’ll be sounding the alarm. Trying to get attention, trying to sell a book. Oh, the mark of the beast, oh Isreal it’s sign, oh the Soviet union army is building a force to attack. Sounding the alarm, books on the prophetic signs, and signs that world is coming to an end. Bible prophecy It’s a total waste, don’t get hooked by that. Please. Don’t let these people rile you up. Don’t get caught up in this. And then Jesus says, this is going to keep happening. And furthermore it’s just the beginning of what he calls the birth pangs.

And in this moment, Jesus completely refines the message of Apocalypse. The message of Daniel is that the pain of endings can be avoided. That if you’re the righteous one all this pain won’t happen to you. With God you can walk right around it, sail right through, without getting hurt at all. Experiencing this suffering is for the bad people, the unbelievers, the outsiders. But Jesus calls this painful suffering what? Birth pangs. Are birth pangs only for bad people? Does it mean you’ve been left behind? That you don’t believe? It’s just the opposite this pain of endings. It’s a sign of new life, isn’t it to feel that pain? A birth pang is a sign of new life. It means that God is at work in you. And the message here seems to be that if you can feel the pain of endings, if you can live that and share that with others, that the gift of God’s Spirit waits for you. Don’t ask God to help you walk around the painful realities of life, ask for God to walk you walk through it. Isn’t that what Jesus did? Did Jesus walk around the pain of endings? Did he sail through fire without a care because God was with him? Hardly. The life he brought to us came through suffering. He shared the suffering of all who have to deal with endings on the cross. And he asked his followers to do the same. Take up your cross he said. And he promised them that if they learned to walk this way, that it would new life. A new heart. The word that probably best describes this is the word “compassion”. Compassion means to suffer with”. That’s where the healing connections are made. God power is the power of compassion.

Unfortunately, much of what you hear when it comes to end times is far from compassionate. Some Christians look forward to the end of the world. They look forward to watching it burn and to see those bad people get what coming to ‘em, and look forward to leaving this world behind. Nothing could be further from the reality of Jesus Christ and his cross. The end of this world is not catastrophe. The end of this world is redemption and new life. This world as broken as it is, will not be cast aside or thrown in the trash heap. God makes it new by sharing in the sufferings of his people. And we will begin to share in God’s work when we learn to do the same. Amen.

So let’s a have a baptism now into the Love of God. Who does not walk away from a suffering world, but shared it on a cross. To show us how to bring healing to our world and its people. Amen.

 So the disciples of Jesus won’t be spared the pain will they? In this Apocalypse, Jesus is talking about the apocalypse that’s coming in a very different way here. Just the opposite of Daniel. In his apocalypse you get to walk around the pain. But Jesus followers will not. Their temple will fall. And furthermore their leader, their rabbi, their Savior won’t come through without a scratch either will he? He ends up on a cross. No as a follower of Jesus, you do not get to escape the pain of endings.