

Imagine ~ November 29, 2009

Jeremiah 33:14-16; I Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

I am certain most of us have heard some of the dire warnings and predictions that surround the year 2012. I know of several pastors who have delivered sermons based on the calculations of the ancient Mayan calendar. These sermons have blended these calculations with the words in the Book of Revelation and some of the apocalyptic readings we encounter as we begin to travel through Advent. Stirred all together they reveal, or so some think, that the end of the world will come about on December 21, 2012. To show you what an exact science this is, others say the end will come on May 11, 2011.

I find it interesting that some Christian ministers seem able to disregard the scriptures of our faith that tell us over and over again that only God knows the time. We are to be the ones who watch and wait and prepare. No human predictions, we are told, can override this. And, yet, we persist in trying.

Predictions of the end of the world seem to be as old as time itself. People take these forecasts so seriously that many sell or give away all they have and gather with others of a like mind to await the second coming of Christ—a time when all will be judged, some will be raptured up and others will be left behind. It will be the end of the world as we know it.

For a number of years people of a spiritual nature have also cited the year 2012 as a time of dramatic change. Instead of destruction and judgment, they foresee a time when something better will emerge from what was. They believe that a seismic shift will take place in the hearts and minds of good people worldwide and all things will be made new again. I was a marginal member of one of these groups long ago. Their emphasis was on studying esoteric writings and discerning what changes might take place in the world order. Their message was one of inclusion, not of exclusion, not of some being saved and others destroyed. It was message that stressed the work of all for the good of all. They believed, and still do, that people all around the world, of many different philosophical and theological traditions were moving forward toward one common goal.

Retired Bishop John Shelby Spong echoed these sentiments when he said that it is necessary for members of the world's religious groups to discern what it is in each system that is their "pearl of great price." When, and only when, this is determined, will all religious groups be able to sit around a table together, reveal what it is they find of greatest importance and discover that for all it is the same essential truth. Then, at last there will be peace.

While the theme song of those who believe 2012 marks the end of civilization might be "It's the End of the World as We Know It..." the song of those who are looking for solutions to the world's problems might be John Lennon's "Imagine"—remember those words:

*Imagine there's no Heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today*

*Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do*

*Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace*

*You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one*

*Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world*

*You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one*

So, as we approach 2012 we have two opposing viewpoints bumping up against each other, the same opposing viewpoints that seem to come from our readings for this morning. On the one hand the prophet Jeremiah is looking for a messiah who will bring the world, as he knew it, together. On the other we have the gospel of Luke telling of the signs that will appear as the end of the world is approaching.

So what do we do with these two viewpoints on this First Sunday of Advent—the Sunday of Hope? Do we try to resolve them? Can we see that, perhaps, they have a similar goal—the unity of humankind and a future that will be full of peace?

Can we grasp the fact that Jesus might have been speaking less of destruction of the world than of a resolution in the hearts and souls and minds of people that would bring us to common ground? Could he have been saying that the old order of things must die away and the new order be born within us? He always spoke of transformation within us. To move forward the old must pass away and a new day must dawn.

.That is the hope for us. We are capable of moving forward, away from the destruction we have embraced in the past toward a new way of viewing and doing things.

.There is a movement forward that is looking for someone or several someones to lead us out of the world we have created that is not working very well and the push to move away from old patterns that hold us back. There is hope that with the effort of all people of conscience and good will life will go on and on beyond 2012 moving toward new vistas of hope, forgiveness joy, love and peace.

-- Amen