

Hope Central Church
Year C, Advent 1, 12/2/2018
"Midwifery"
The Rev. Laura Ruth Jarrett

Psalm 25:1-10

To you, O God, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O God;
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O God, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O God!

Good and upright is God;
therefore God instructs sinners in the way.
God leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble God's way.
All the paths of God are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep God's covenant and decrees.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia . . .

Please rise as you are led and able for a reading from the gospel.

Luke 21:25-36

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Human One coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Then Jesus told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the dominion of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Human One.”

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. Romans 8:22

Please, will you pray with me . . .

On November 1, on the eve of the election, Taj Smith, the organizer for faith traditions for the yes on thee campaign, the election when we successful voted to sustain the rights of our transforms came to Hope Central to preach. He so carefully and accurately taught us of the jewish and christian literary genre in our sacred scripture called apocalyptic writing. Taj taught how for every upheaval in the social order, as a way to describe the horror that must be faced and the hope for what may be

birthed, a literature is rendered that may be code for the people oppressed longing for freedom - code that condemns the imperial colonizer, imagines its collapse and hopes for the release and restoration of the people. In Hebrew scripture, Daniel's wheel inside a wheel is such a writing, and Revelation with its seven seals and the horseman is thought to be commentary on the judgement and demise of the Roman empire. Taj hoped for the apocalypse of a culture that does not see him and other transfolks and the hope of the birth of a culture that includes and relishes transfolks.

Luke, too, is such a book, written after Roman empire and her emissaries, governors and rulers, and even the temple class Hasmodians had killed thousands, weekly littering the roadside to Golgotha with crucified debtors and insurrectionists. The people were redlined as it were, no credit was available, no jobs, land taken, and all that could be produced went to Rome to feed the machine. The people suffered. they cried out to God for justice. Jesus was murdered, the temple was destroyed, the people who survived were refugees and ended up at the borders of syria, beggin for entry.

It was a apocalypse and Luke was writing about it 60 years after it all happened, telling it as if it had not yet, mining memory and collected stories for the wisdom such retelling generates. Our portion today is at the end of Jesus public ministry, from the "apocalyptic discourse" as Biblical Scholars call it, a discussion of the end times. Luke asks our attention to the danger, don't you see the signs? They are clear. They are stealing from us, killing us. Be ready.

The apocolyptic discourse is not about the sweet by and by that is still to come, when Jesus comes again in glory, but is about the pogrom of the Jews in the first century in Israel.

It was not the last pogrom, we know, and there are been other pogroms and devastations since, of Jews, of women, people of African Descent in Europe and the Americas, of Gay, Lesbian, Bi, A and Ace, Trans and other queer folks, and now din Yemen, in Puerto Rico and in central and south America, and people at our borders. It goes on and on the diabolical work of empire.

The rulers require more taxes of the people for the enrichment of the deathly. They and their religious cronies pervert the scriptures. They ignore the plunder of the poor. They starve the orphan and the widow. This is the story of then, but it is also the story of now.

The apocalypse is coming. Do you not see the signs, Jesus asks in Luke. The signs are plain, Jesus says, like when summer's on it's way, you see the leaves pop out on fig trees, for example. It's clear as that.

I have never given birth and it is one of my great sorrows - and maybe it is one of yours, too - to have never been pregnant or given birth to a live child. I mourn for us. I grieve for what will not be for you and for me, if a child that has come through us is what we have wished for.

But my mother has given birth. She had two births before she pushed me out, and after me, another birth. There are four of us girls from my mother. And my father helped, of course.

My mother's own birth was in a small village in Inhamaschafo, a tiny village in Mozambique. Her father, my grandfather had ridden away in a jeep on deeply rutted unpaved roads to fetch the European doctor, the missionary doctor, the Methodist doctor. And while he was away, the village midwife attended my mother's birth and cared for my grandmother. I don't know if it was an easy birth or not, but mother came out. My grandmother lived to 100 less 6 days and my mom is still living in excellent health at age 87.

I've been watching videos of births on Youtube, and all of you who have done this amazing thing are now super human to me - it is awesome work of bone cracking labor to bring through you, by cesarean or between your legs, a human life.

In Advent each year, we prepare ourselves for the birth of Jesus, a divine one born in the human way - and we have arranged ourselves in various ways around this story.

We have remembered the birth of our own children, or siblings, or friends.

We have enshrined a compulsory and adoring heterosexism.

We have anticipated the birth through the ritual of a Christmas pageant,

or we have waited for the arrival of Jesus who must be unwrapped first so we can get home and unwrap the other gifts we have fondled, shook, and pried with our X-ray eyes to see what is there.

This year during Advent, we are asking you to imagine ourselves as midwives - which first of all, etymologically means “with women.” Though in our congregation we understand it to mean “with one who give birth.”

Midwives attend those who give birth, provide reproductive care for health, give prenatal, delivery and post-natal care.

Midwives inherited their wisdom and learned their skill from their parents and ancestors in community, and recently from other medical professionals and professional training programs. Midwives have been and are thought to have magical powers. They and their skillful ability to coax a new life to arrive or a person birthing to survive - stand in the breach between life and death. Midwives traditional acquired a wealth of plant medicine wisdom - provided care when no other has skill or none other will bother. In African American literature and culture, the midwife stands as a symbol of one who brings about life regardless of how empire or white supremacy arranges death for a people.

Imagining ourselves as midwives requires of us a change of position, place, and purpose. It asks us to give up our eternal protected innocence as hapless passers by and brings us face to face with the portal of life.

Imagining ourselves as midwives means we become the ones who are neither in control of the birthing person, but it means that we have, through spiritual devotion to purpose, practiced and have the depth of resilience, character and skill to grow and know ourselves so that we may be available for another reality groaning to come to life.

It means because of our practice, we are ready to bring ourselves to the center of the where chaos is breaking so we may attend and support with our experience and sure hands the crowning.

I want to ask us to give up our precious tending of our fragility, the requirement and entitlement of being attended. I want us to grow proud not of our mere ability to name our feelings and tell our past, but I want us to compost what harmed us into strength, depth, resilience for the tending of the world that is groaning for justice. I want us to work skillfully and in shifts so that when we are tired, we rest and come back refreshed. I want us to get more and more skilled at measuring our capacities so that we know when to comfort, and when to take ourselves to our most trusted ones to be comforted. I want us to breathe before we react.

I want to ask us, not to ignore ourselves and our needs, but I'm wanting to ask us to know and heal so that we may get on with the work of tending the Marys of the world who are needing a place to lay her weary head so she need not labor on a donkey or on the road from Guatemala through Mexico to give birth in a detention camp in Texas. I want Mary to no longer be an exotic other, but instead, be one of us.

Christ is coming y'all, and we could chose as a congregation to be skilled enough and strong enough to endure with skill and joy through the whole birth of the world from wrenching labor to life giving latching, from death's door to robust life.

We see the signs and in community, as a people, healed, wise, and skilled we turn to the birth of hope.