

APOCALYPSE



A church member told me every time i quote a pop/punk/folk/rock song it costs him money because he buys the song. Your money's well spent on **Pompeii**, by Bastille. It's pleasant and disturbing at once.



POMPEII

I WAS LEFT TO MY OWN DEVICES
MANY DAYS FELL AWAY WITH NOTHING TO SHOW
AND THE WALLS KEPT TUMBLING DOWN
IN THE CITY THAT WE LOVE
GREY CLOUDS ROLL OVER THE HILLS
BRINGING DARKNESS FROM ABOVE
BUT IF YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES
DOES IT ALMOST FEEL LIKE NOTHING CHANGED
AT ALL?
AND IF YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES
DOES IT ALMOST FEEL LIKE YOU'VE BEEN HERE
BEFORE?
HOW AM I GONNA BE AN OPTIMIST ABOUT THIS?
HOW AM I GONNA BE AN OPTIMIST ABOUT THIS?
WE WERE CAUGHT UP AND LOST IN ALL OF OUR
VICES
IN YOUR POSE AS THE DUST SETTLED AROUND US
AND THE WALLS KEPT TUMBLING DOWN
IN THE CITY THAT WE LOVE
GREY CLOUDS ROLL OVER THE HILLS
BRINGING DARKNESS FROM ABOVE
BUT IF YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES

DOES IT ALMOST FEEL LIKE NOTHING CHANGED
AT ALL?
AND IF YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES
DOES IT ALMOST FEEL LIKE YOU'VE BEEN HERE
BEFORE?
HOW AM I GONNA BE AN OPTIMIST ABOUT THIS?
HOW AM I GONNA BE AN OPTIMIST ABOUT THIS?
OH, WHERE DO WE BEGIN?
THE RUBBLE OR OUR SINS?
OH, OH, WHERE DO WE BEGIN?
THE RUBBLE OR OUR SINS?
AND THE WALLS KEPT TUMBLING DOWN
IN THE CITY THAT WE LOVE
GREY CLOUDS ROLL OVER THE HILLS
BRINGING DARKNESS FROM ABOVE
BUT IF YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES
DOES IT ALMOST FEEL LIKE NOTHING CHANGED
AT ALL?
AND IF YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES
DOES IT ALMOST FEEL LIKE YOU'VE BEEN HERE
BEFORE?
HOW AM I GONNA BE AN OPTIMIST ABOUT THIS?

Last week a friend of mine said, "I kinda feel like we're living at the end of days." The next day a delivery driver told me this wasn't the apocalypse he was expecting. I'm sure you've had similar thoughts. The past couple of years have been apocalyptic for many of us, even though the systems of disfunction, injustice, and denial have been

setting the stage for decades. And if you live long enough and read enough history, you know that the world is always ending somewhere, for someone.

LIKE YOU'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE?

Apocalypse is mundane and earth shattering, depending on where you're standing. The slow grind of history's rhyme meets social and environmental collapse. Like Pompeii in 79 AD.

But apocalypse isn't first about the end of the world. It's a Greek loan word that means unveiling. Apocalypse pulls back the curtain to see a soft old man behind the great and powerful Wizard. In Jewish apocalyptic literature like parts of Daniel and in Christian(ish) literature like Revelation, what's unveiled doesn't begin with the future, but with a deadly present. Those writing are laden with visions too bright for words, poetry that never translates well into pictures, and a terrible mixture of death and hope.

Obscure and inaccessible, they might still have something to contribute to the experience of living through inflection points in history.

It's not unique to say over the past few years we've seen a stripping back of the veneer covering our world. Fear, social displacement and loss of imagined power elevated history's flimsiest aspirant dictator to the presidency. The pandemic is laying bare both the frailty of human bodies and the frailty of medical systems, public and private. The realities of inequity, the living crisis of housing and food insecurity in one of the planet's richest nations is on full display. The shroud of polite indifference has been lifted and the deep scars of endemic racism have been exposed. The Triune God of global capitalism/competition, willful ignorance, and outright lies is pushing us deep into climate catastrophe.

BUT IF YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES

Apocalypse doesn't just expose injustices and lies, though. When everything breaks apart, anything is (im)possible. There is an invitation in disaster, a still, small voice hinting at a new world.

The dual nature of apocalypse is death and hope: not steps— hope doesn't neatly follow from death— but a messy mix.

Maybe parts of the early church latched onto the Revelation because of that invitation to imaginative thinking. Yes, the book loaded with death and destruction and centers on beasts and 666 (code for Nero, the cruel kaiser who persecuted both Jews and their oddball Christians cousins in the 60's CE), but it begins and ends with visions of the calm, overwhelming presence of Jesus and a renewed creation of peace: faint hope —“a new heaven and a new earth.”

Maybe those early Christians made that text their own because they thought newness inevitable; that justice must follow the death of injustice; when cruelty is chained and thrown into the pit, generosity takes its place.

Yes. In apocalypse, old worlds end and new worlds are possible. But that's never a guarantee. After the Russian Revolution, Marxists traded communism for oligarchical rule. The American Civil War led to Jim Crow.

AM I GONNA BE AN OPTIMIST ABOUT THIS?

Maybe it seems like i'm dismissing the angst of apocalypse. Believe me, that's not what i'm going for. How you feel about that is... how you feel. Maybe you swing between sleepless terror to glimmers of hope and back again. Maybe the uncertainty gives you a little thrill and you're excited to see what'll happen next. Maybe you're a mixture of both.

Apocalypse invites us to lament and wail, mourning what's broken. And it invites dreams in the midst of crises. It never say, "Everything is going to be OK," and it never invites us to return to (i hate this word) "normality."

Part of the calling of the church is to stand on Patmos with Revelation's mysterious narrator and to see the world as it is and to dream dreams of what it could be. There's nothing magical about that. The work of visioning means looking around at what's being exposed and imagining ways to mitigate pain.

WHERE DO WE BEGIN, THE RUBBLE OR OUR SINS?

As we move toward a climate that isn't out of place with some of the graphic horrors of Revelation, the prophetic role of the church is two fold. First, it means speaking truth to power, lobbying and protesting for and demanding systemic changes to begin to ameliorate the impact of a rapidly heating earth.

And second, it means preparing to help our neighbors, close and global, who will live in the transformed world. It means looking with clear eyes at what the planet will look like and imagine ways to alleviate the suffering of Christ in the world.

The same is true for for racism which has recently been laid bare.

The same is true for the looming housing crisis.

And this and future pandemics.

The list could go on and on.

So, two things as we face apocalypse. First, take comfort: the worst is yet to come. Second, plan and work and hope and pray for renewal and transformation: a new heaven and a new earth.