

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, New York
“Stuck in Brokenness”

Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore April 14, 2019

Call to Celebration

Hear these challenging words from Eckart Tolle:

When faced with a radical crisis, when the old way of being in the world, of interacting with each other and with the realm of nature doesn't work anymore, when survival is threatened by seemingly insurmountable problems, an individual human – or a species – will either die or become extinct or rise above their limitations with an evolutionary leap. This is the state of humanity now, and this is its challenge.

As Jesus stood looking out over Jerusalem from Mount Olivet, he believed he was bringing that evolutionary leap for his moment. He brought that message from Galilee to Jerusalem *hoping* that it would be heard.

It wasn't and he was killed by the Romans. But that message didn't die with him.

Sobered by the state of the world and willing to consider actions that will make a positive difference, let us ponder the next evolutionary leap of consciousness that is needed now – as we join together in the celebration of life.

Reading

Luke 19:37-44

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began **joyfully** to praise God, in loud voices, for all the miracles they had seen:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

“I tell you,” Jesus replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.”

Homily

Coming around the hill covered in olive trees, and looking down to see the enormous Temple would have been awe inspiring in Jesus' time. The magnificent Temple greatly enhanced with improvements and

expansions by King Herod was spectacular to behold. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were gathering for Passover. Excitement was in the air.

But when Jesus saw the city of Jerusalem ... he wept over it.

This is what Jesus does again and again. He reverses your expectations. He puts conventional wisdom on its head. Remember those first lines of his famous Sermon on the Mount:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst (after righteousness), for they will be filled.

[AND,] You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’¹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Jesus carried the mantle of a prophet – which meant his followers believed he could anticipate what would happen in the future. As he predicted the destruction of the city, it would have surprised his disciples. In that moment, it would be the furthest thing from his disciples’ minds. They thought Jesus’ arrival meant salvation for them all! He was the Messiah!

The magnificence and splendor of the second version of Solomon’s Temple was staggering. It spoke of the power of the Jewish people to eventually throw off the oppressive Roman rulers just as the Hasmoneans and the Maccabees had done with the Greeks. It was only a matter of time before the Romans would be driven out – and Jesus was the Messiah to do it.

But Jesus predicts the utter destruction of the stunning Temple before them. Not one rock will be left on top of another!

This story comes to us through the Gospel of Luke. Scholars believe it was composed after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE by the Roman Legions after four years of Jewish rebellion. They didn’t just destroy it, they laid waste to the entire city and killed everyone who didn’t escape. Scholars believe this got included into Luke’s version of the Jesus narrative amplifying and verifying him as a prophet whose predictions came true.

One may not have needed supernatural foresight to recognize the Jewish – Roman relationship was destined for a bad end. The Roman taxation was oppressive. If land owners couldn’t pay their taxes they could borrow to pay using their land as collateral. And if they couldn’t pay their loans back, they lost their property. Land was a poor person’s only safety net. Without it, one became a day laborer only earning enough to eat that day and they could no longer support a family.

Added to the Roman taxes were Herod’s taxes to build magnificent buildings like his Temple renovations. Added to those two taxes were the taxes to support the Temple in Jerusalem. Every year or two a new Messiah would rise up to liberate the Jews from all this oppression. They usually only lasted long enough to be executed by the Romans, often by crucifixion. A King David like military leader was who Judas thought Jesus would be and was deeply disappointed in his non-violence. Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s? Forget about it! Destroy them!

As Jesus looks out over Jerusalem, however, no armies are gathering and no war is predicted. Jesus' disciples may have anticipated Jesus taking over peacefully through the power of his loving heart and message. He enters the city on a donkey, not coming like a warrior king riding a horse to do battle but as a man of peace.

At our joint service last Sunday I heard Chris Bystroff's message from the platform saying it is too late to save humanity. In him, I heard the voice of a modern day prophet. Chris spoke out chastising our wayward nation and world. He predicted doom from catastrophic climate change. We look around us and see a few of the effects at this point – without appreciating what is coming and preparing for the worst. A climate change denier occupies the White House. A Republican controlled Senate refuses to act. Even those nations in Europe trying to comply with greenhouse gas reduction goals are failing to follow through.

And most people, unfortunately, tend to shrug off climate change prophets like Chris because climate change doesn't seem to be affecting our daily lives ... yet. Better to put off the really hard stuff until tomorrow and take small steps today. Put up solar panels and recycle cans and bottles – but keep flying and driving, burning up those fossil fuels.

But those days of denial are numbered, and the catastrophic effects will likely come much faster than we are prepared for. Meanwhile glaciers continue melt at an ever accelerating rate. The Arctic ice continues to disappear. Without the Arctic being covered in ice, the sun's heat will stop being reflected back and the permafrost will melt, releasing an enormous amount of methane that is a powerful greenhouse gas, about 30 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.

Corral reefs continue to suffer from warming ocean waters that are becoming more acidic as the carbon dioxide dissolves from the air, lowering the pH. Increasing average temperatures will have a negative effect on grain yields. It will also dry out soils accelerating desertification around the world. Without melt from glaciers, the fresh water supply will become more unstable for agricultural use in places that need to feed a lot of people like India.

In Jesus' day, Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish universe with critical religious practices commanded by Moses to be done in the home of the Ark of the Covenant. When the Temple was decimated and leveled they had to reconstitute their religion in a new form, one centered in the synagogue and guided by Rabbis rather than temple priests. This new form of their faith allowed them to move across the world and be free of an individual location where all the critical worshipping was done.

We are going to be displaced too. Once climate change is in full swing, we will not be able to ignore it nor live the way we've lived in the past. The big question is whether civilization can endure what is coming and still hold together, or will we be plunged into a second version of the dark ages that are more like midnight than twilight.

Already amphibians are experiencing mysterious die-offs. Sea level rise is already affecting Miami. The insect apocalypse threatens to accelerate the die-off of birds and mammals that depend on them for food. Many of the big movements of populations happening today are driven by climate changes that are adversely affecting agriculture. Our President doesn't understand that most people would much rather stay home than risk life and limb going to a place they have never been where they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. So many have no choice - to remain will mean death.

Reading an essay by Catherine Ingram titled the [Facing Extinction](#) didn't cheer me up (Google it if you're feeling too happy). Some of the trends we are facing are terrifying. Jews after the destruction of the Temple must have felt their lives were over too and their religion would go extinct. Yet Judaism didn't collapse and die.

A rational person considering the evidence is not going to be encouraged by the environmental problems we are going to face in the next 100 to 200 years. The soon to be 8 billion of us isn't sustainable. The prophets are predicting humanity may not survive what is ahead of us. Hearing the urgency of the problem, we wonder if there is time to make the changes needed or is it, as Chris suggested, already too late to make any changes that will make a difference.

Jews didn't heed the prophecy Jesus brought and suffered the consequences. We've been getting the message louder and louder about climate change and the world still isn't responding adequately. Maybe it is now too late to do anything about it.

What we know for sure is we don't know how things will all play out. It may be that if we strive to unify as a world community to respond to the threats we might be able to change enough to avoid extinction. Massive loss of life is probable but maybe we can avoid social collapse that will make everything vastly worse.

Whatever the future holds, what we do now matters a great deal. The only path that makes sense to me is the evolution of human consciousness. Human beings must begin caring more about the survival of the whole than our individual and tribal preferences. Religious movements like ours that urge us in this direction as our sixth principle, "the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all," can be part of the promotion of that evolution of consciousness. We're going to have to put the survival of life on this planet first.

Resilient communities tend to survive better than resilient individuals. That was true of the Jews after the destruction of the Temple. May that be true of humanity as we face the existential climate change threats ahead of us.

And always remember that nature bats last and there are no guarantees. If we fail, I know I want to go down working and striving for the benefit of all beings, for the benefit of the whole.

Benediction

I close with words from *Confronting Collapse* by Michael C. Ruppert:

...we are faced with a choice that can no longer be postponed or evaded. Evolve or perish. Adapt or die. That is the universe in which all species live. Those are the rules that govern all life. We are not that special. We are not exempt. Our evolution must be one of consciousness. (Page 215)

May this congregation be a part of facilitating that evolution of consciousness for the benefit of all beings.