

Jesus knew that for the disciples, it would feel like the end. His imminent death, that in fact he had been predicting, and the events that would follow would feel like the end for them. Their dreams of a new political order, the great reversal of the haves and have-nots, the healings and transformations--what would come of it? Surely now, it would all end.

So realistically, Jesus described what would happen. Your temple will be destroyed. There will be wars, famines, disease, natural disasters, false prophets. You will be persecuted. Your family and friends will betray you...but when all that happens, try not to be afraid. Try to remember that the destruction, the grief, the fear (that he knew would definitely come up), the suffering--that's not God's doing. God's wisdom, God's strength will protect your spirit. God will intimately know each hair on your head and somehow, by your endurance you will gain your souls. In other words, as the world falls apart, keep the faith.

There have been times in my life where I've thought, "Yes, God! We will endure, we will keep the faith and carry out your vision on earth!" And other times I've thought, "WTF God. Where are you? It really does look hopeless out there."

In a recent, faith-reflecting-faith-questioning moment, I turned to a friend who also is an "Abby" Presbyterian pastor. Currently serving the church-at-large as a climate activist, she's been organizing for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to divest from fossil fuels and also is working on her Phd in eco-feminist theology. If you'd meet her, you'd find her fire-i-ness invitational and her joy contagious. You might join her on the floor coloring, or find yourself spontaneously dancing. She's not a suit and heels kind of feminist.

She's also honest about the grief she's carrying about the world's current state of climate emergency. So when I turned to her recently to talk about my grief and fear about this too, we started discussing our faith and wonder about where God is in all this destruction happening and if there really is hope.

And now, after almost five months of me being here as your Associate Rector you're going to get some Reformed theology out of me. My friend turned to me and said, "Abbi, we believe in total depravity. We expect that as humans we are going to mess up and cause harm on earth. And yet, through God's grace, we have faith anyway, we try to do better anyway." It clicked again for me. God created us in the image of God as imperfect beings. God's grace is this hard-to-understand gift of love and empowerment that in the midst of where we mess up we're still worthy of love, we're still enough. Grace is our foundation, from which we respond with faithfulness and action. Maybe you haven't heard of total depravity being empowering before, but for me, knowing that God created us beautiful and imperfect and that *God still has faith in us*, compels me to keep faith in God's vision on earth as a reality, that we have the capacity to respond to the ugliness of our world with grace too. I had to turn to a friend to help find that faith

again, and in the midst of our honesty and grief, we found the assurance that God is indeed here loving us and helping us along the way, just as Jesus predicted.

But if some Reformed theology doesn't do it for you, maybe this will.

Mario Benedetti was a poet and journalist who lived in exile during a military dictatorship of Uruguay. He wrote about the cries and the persistence and the beauty of his people. He wrote this poem about Uruguay in 1975 called "Por qué cantamos?" or "Why do we sing?". Not much of Benedetti's work is published in English, but I learned of this poem through a seminary professor I had who recites this with his Christian community. I'm going to recite a translation, but I need your help. I will read the verses, and for the refrain, I'll turn to you and we will all say together, "You will ask why we sing." Practice it with me for a moment and repeat after me: "You will ask why we sing."

Hear this poem:

if each hour brings death
If time is a den of thieves
The breezes carry a scent of evil
And life is just a moving target
you will ask why we sing
if our finest people are shunned
Our homeland is dying of sorrow
And the human heart is shattered
Even before shame explodes
you will ask why we sing
if the trees and the sky remain
As far off as the horizon
Some absence hovers over the evening
And disappointment colours the morning
you will ask why we sing
we sing because the river is humming
And when the river hums
The river hums
We sing because cruelty has no name
But we can name its destiny
We sing because the child because

everything
Because the future because the people
We sing because the survivors
And our dead want us to sing
you will ask why we sing
we sing because shouting is not enough
Nor is sorrow or anger
We sing because we believe in people
And we shall overcome these defeats
you will ask why we sing
we sing because the sun recognizes us
And the fields smell of spring
And because in this stem and that fruit
Every question has its answer
you will ask why we sing
we sing because it is raining on the furrow
And we are the militants of life
And because we cannot and will not
Allow our song to become ashes
We sing

Mario Benedetti reflects the kingdom of God within his community. He's honest about the reality of death and assuming hopelessness, but like Jesus' death on the cross, Benedetti doesn't let that be the last word. He practices hope, he resurrects the resilience and strength of the community, he finds the faith. He remembers the ancestors and strength and struggle of the

people before, he looks toward the possible future for the children, he turns toward the beautiful stability of God's creation...and sings. This is what they do. This is how they hold onto their humanity. They sing. Although their hearts may be crying, although their grief may try to bury them alive, they sing. They find the resources and strength within the community and sing because how else do you live?

Our faith is one that never promises that life will be easy. That we'll always be comfortable. That we'll inherit great wealth, that we'll be happy and fulfilled. Our faith teaches us to long for, to work towards, maintain the faith in God's promise that earth will be restored. And maybe, we won't actually see this restoration complete in our lifetime, but that glimmer, those glimpses of God's glory, the moments we sense--what Rev. Shannon Kershner over at Fourth Pres. calls-- God's "islands of already" in a "sea of not yet"--will help us keep the faith.

Soon we will be entering the season of Advent, where the days are darker and shorter and we yearn for, long for a leader to make things right in the world. It will feel like the end. It can be a hard season, but our continued faith rattles the means of death in this world, and when our savior comes as a little baby, we'll see that it's not the end, but just another beginning.

In the name of our Creator, our Redeemer and Sustainer, Amen.