

## Tending Ancient Paths

### The Paradigms, Posture, and Practices of Jesus

#### So what's next?

Pictures of bombed out and leveled buildings with smoke rising has become a norm as we said goodbye to 2023 and look towards 2024. Its hard to find a news source that does not have some sort of headline reminding us of the horrors being experienced in our world. Attempts to understand the violence can be equally difficult as we hear justifications for bloody retaliatory violence. In more than one instance I have found myself in the uncomfortable position of being challenged for not taking a 'side' but attempting to denounce all expression of violence. Beloved, to be clear a cease fire is not what is needed- an ending of war is what is needed in the Ukraine - in Gaza - in Israel. The longer I study the life of Jesus the more I am convinced that He is not interested in 'justified' violence. Jesus came to close the book on violence.

He came into a violent world as a baby and even as a baby His presence is seen as a threat that is responded to with violence in taking the lives of babies in Bethlehem. And the weeping for the innocent ones has not ended has it? As I was praying this past week on the day of remembering the murder of the innocents - I am challenged as to how often I have allowed my thinking to be shaped by an image of justice that looks more like John Wayne than Jesus Christ! We have no end to images of 'Redemptive Violence' portrayed in story form over and over and yet, Jesus takes up a Cross and renounces the Sword. This is the Gospel of Jesus that comes to reveal an image of a world healed not by 'redemptive violence' but by a King who lays down the sword and absorbs the violence of men to redeem mankind. This is the Gospel!

So what do we do when we start the year with images of violence in classrooms, neighborhoods, cities leveled beyond recognition? Blessed are those who mourn... one of the most powerful observations I have heard Denise proclaim in the face of sadness and violence - First we grieve - we don't just choose sides and assign blame or hide away...but then, and this is her heart cry- 'our grief has hope, gives way to hope'. Blessed are those who mourn they will be comforted. Our comfort is not our weak ideas of justice but in God's justice - listen to how this is worded in the Prayer of the Week from the Common Book of Prayer '*O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored the dignity of human nature; Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled Himself to share our humanity...*'

Interesting that the lectionary text for last Sunday was from the Gospel of Mark chapter 1:1-11 ( read it in Kingdom New Testament by N.T. Wright). Mark begins his gospel with this incredible statement '***This is where the good news starts-the good news of Jesus the Messiah, God's son.***'

Most scholars locate Mark in Rome at the time of his writing. Rome is becoming a hellish place for Christians under Nero. Known for his extravagance and tyranny this is the Roman emperor who killed his mother and wife. Although not documented it has been passed down that he played the fiddle while half of Rome burned. The fire of AD 64 is rumored to be a plot of Nero who saw himself as unstoppable in his desires and devices. The fire, which he blamed on Christians - this group of men and women who bowed their knee to another King - led to wholesale persecution of Christians in Rome. **This was NOT a good time to be a follower of a Jewish Messiah named Jesus.** AD 66 Titus has begun to forcefully put down the Jewish revolt in Israel that would set out to completely remove Israel from the face of the earth wiping out Jerusalem, burning the temple, outlawing the language, and renaming the country Palestine. This is the actual hostile world that Mark is living in - hostile to his Jewish heritage and his Christian faith. To put it lightly the world is coming apart for these young believers in Rome - nothing was ever going to be the same. It was like Rome had completely lost its mind.

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And the secret is simply this: **Christ in you!**

Yes, Christ in you bringing with him the hope of all glorious things to come. Col 1:27b, JB Phillips

Well some say that Nero definitely had lost his mind - many Christians believed Nero to be the anti-Christ. He commits suicide at the age of 30 in AD 68 and what follows is what is called the year of four emperors until finally Vespasian wages war against what is now a divided Roman empire, enters Italy from Egypt and defeats the sitting emperor Vitellus and is declared emperor of Rome. Watch this—all of the Roman empire celebrates what is called ‘good tidings’ and every city celebrates the ‘Good News’ hosting celebrations of a reunited Roman empire and their Emperor! In a world wondering what is next—they look to their political leadership and celebrate good tidings – they proclaim good news.

**Mark begins his gospel in this same world that had ‘lost its mind’ with this proclamation;  
 “This is where the Good News starts—the Good News of Jesus the Messiah, God’s son”**

In a world asking 'what’s next?' Mark locates the good news, not in a political Savior or the hope of personal security, (something most follower’s of Jesus had no real hope for ). Mark locates the Good News not in empire or emperor but in the Good News of Jesus Christ the Messiah.

**Beloved as we begin 2024—our practice of prayer is not about trying to get God to ‘fix’ the ailments of our culture and world. To be clear it is right to pray for our culture and world, it simply is not the primary purpose of prayer. The purpose of our practice of prayer is that we are properly formed in an ever changing world so that we can locate the Good News of our life, here in a Man-Jesus Christ the Messiah. In 2024 the hope of Glory is Christ in you—this is where the Good News starts beloved, then, now, and always!**

**A Simple Prayer as we begin 2024**

Replace my fears with the revelation of Jesus Christ.  
 Where I fear lack, remind me of His abundance.  
 Where I fear sickness, remind me of His wholeness.  
 Where I fear others, remind me of His reconciliation. Where I fear being wrong, remind me of His freedom.

Forgive the ways I use fear as an excuse to limit love.  
 Forgive me when I use my thoughts and words as tools of fear.  
 You are love.  
 Humanity is your beloved.  
 I often forget this in my fears.  
 Today, I wish to remember. Amen.

**El Salvador Outreach—2024**

- We will again be sending a team to El Salvador in March of 2024!
- Over the last several years we have partnered with Pastor Louis Alvarado to minister to some of the poorest and most needy of El Salvador.
- Our annual offering has helped to rebuild homes, pay medical expenses, pay funeral expenses, purchase wheel chairs, provide seed, fertilizer, food, and more. All funds given go to minister to the people of this community.
- As a result there are regular monthly gatherings naming the name of Jesus in San Pablo Taco Chico that have reached hundreds. The Good News is Preached to the Poor...
- Last year we were able to help over 55 families and continue our on-going monthly work.
- Please pray about participating in El Salvador this year as we send a team—this offering is a combined effort of Praise International, TAP Fort Wayne, and Pastor Luis Alvarado.
- Thank you for your prayerful consideration.

With gratitude and integrity we steward your gifts. Thank you for partnering with the mission the Lord has given us in this hour as we partner with Him for His kingdom to expand.

Please make your **tax deductible** contribution to:

**Tending Ancient Paths (TAP) Fort Wayne**

**5907 West Wallen Road,**

**Fort Wayne, IN 46818**

Ben and Denise, Please agree with us over these prayer needs for the next month...

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