

One of my longstanding, and still favourite television shows, is Buffy the Vampire Slayer. It was a show about metaphysical forces, good fighting evil often on a grand cosmic scale.

One of the running jokes was about all the apocalypses that took place in the course of the show—about eighteen of them altogether. Each of them, in different ways, were close calls with the end of the world—except for the intrepid heroes who save the day, and the world, from its peril. About every six months.

In a way though the apocalypses of popular culture have preserved something of the Christian imagination. The last book of the Bible—the one we call Revelation—is in Greek called *apokalypsis*, and the first words of that book are “the apocalypse (or revelation) of Jesus Christ.” And our reading from Corinthians, too—don’t blink or you’ll miss it—speaks of an apocalypse. Paul writes of his thankfulness that the church in Corinth is “not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing [*apokalypsis*] of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

On the one hand “revelation” does get at the meaning of “apocalypse.” An apocalyptic event, for Paul, and the writer of Revelation, *reveals* something that was hidden. And much like we see in the world of pop culture, an *apocalypse* doesn’t just reveal, it reveals through earth-shaking and world-changing battles between cosmic forces.

* * *

You gotta hand it to the prophets of Ancient Israel—they certainly don’t fool around. An apocalypse was something Isaiah wanted. So our reading from Isaiah begins with a *plea, a hope, a desire* for an apocalypse. “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence - as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil - to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!”

And where Paul in First Corinthians just assumes that the apocalypse of Jesus Christ will come, Mark thickens the description: “In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will

be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.”

But in the Biblical imagination, apocalypses aren't simply for the end of days. (Kind of like on Buffy.) There is the Big Huge Apocalypse—the end of days, when the Son of Man descends on the clouds, fully revealed to the world, and justice is finally, and *completely* accomplished. But they can also be just around the corner. We might even find ourselves in the middle of one.

So when Isaiah, and Mark, each in their own way speak of apocalypses, they aren't only concerned with the single and final Day of the Lord when all is made right. They are also concerned with those moments in history when the curtain is pulled back in smaller ways, within the scope of history. As Israel longs for the final revelation of God's justice, it also speaks of the way God is revealed in its own exile, and in its hope for restoration to Jerusalem. And when Mark writes of the final day of final days, he only does so after describing the destruction of the temple—a real-life historical event that, in its own way, revealed God at work in history.

So there's a kind of twin vision in Biblical apocalypses—the Great Big One when all is revealed, and all is set right; and the smaller ones, when smaller but still important things are revealed about God and the world we live in.

* * *

And what might this mean for us? What would it mean to speak not only about the big revelation, the big reset? But to speak of the little apocalypses, the revelations of the injustices of our time, and God's hope for setting that right?

Perhaps I should ask the question more bluntly. Is COVID an apocalypse?

Almost certainly. It's not the end of the world (even though some days it might feel that way). But the question as to whether COVID is an apocalypse or not doesn't hang on whether or not it is ushering in the end of the world. But rather, the questions are: is something being revealed

that once was hidden? In what ways, in COVID, can we see what's *really going on in the world*? And does it reveal something about injustice, and its remedy?

COVID is revealing real disparities in our world, and certainly showing that we operate as though some of us are dispensable. The most egregious example has been Residence Herron in Dorval Quebec. Very early in the pandemic, COVID infections ripped through the facility, and when regional health authorities visited, they found three employees on site caring for 133 neglected residents, some in overflowing diapers, and others suffering from dehydration. 38 people died there in three weeks alone.

Something that was hidden, was revealed: people with disabilities in personal care are a source of profit, maximized through exploitative labour practices, labour practices that left us unready to care for those who need care.

In Ontario, our own for-profit personal care homes haven't fared much better. By June, a third of all Ontario nursing home residents who died from COVID were from two corporate chains, Sienna Senior Living and Revera Inc. And we are experiencing again, in the second wave, disproportionate numbers of people dying in long-term care from COVID once again.

And it's not just because the elderly are more prone to contracting COVID. The deaths are disproportionate. An interim report on conditions in long-term care is telling us that these deaths are a result of lack of preparedness and chronic staffing issues, revealing that our difficulty in caring for elderly is partly a result of health-care profiteering: cutting corners and underpaying healthcare workers.

But that's just one way we can speak of COVID as an apocalypse, as the revelation of something hidden. There are others inequalities that have been amplified by COVID. Increasingly we see the need for better mental health services. This was true before, but is becoming even more apparent now. And the simple fact that even in COVID, the richest among us are still getting richer, and the poorest among us are still getting poorer, reveals something else: that even in a global pandemic that is affecting the economy so significantly, our economy is rigged for the benefit of people who already have, and rigged against those who don't.

First Sunday of Advent, rcl yr a, November 29th, 2020
Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

So we aren't facing the end of the world like they did so often in the Buffyverse. And it might not look like we are fighting the devils and the demons either. But COVID is an enemy, and it is revealing things to us that we would be well-advised to be attentive to.

And so as we pray today, "your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven," may we pray for God's final triumph over all evil and every injustice, that God would set all things finally to right. But even as we pray for God's *ultimate* victory, may we also be attentive to the little apocalypses of our own time, looking not just the the *last* day when all is made right and good, but to look also to the day of the Lord that is *today*.

Pray that we would we see God's victory over the poor choices we are making now. Pray that we would see God's victory over the petty, perverse and selfish desires of the present, praying that God would not only reveal them, but crush them under his feet, establishing justice not only on the last day, but *today*.

The Revd Dr Preston DS Parsons