

### **ISAIAH 25:1-5**

O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more it will never be rebuilt.

Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress a shelter from the rainstorm and shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place. You subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.

### **MATTHEW 24:1-14**

Jesus came out of the temple and was going away when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. Then he asked them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down." Afterwards, when he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us when this will be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered them, "Beware that no one leads

you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, “I am the Messiah! and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will famines and earthquakes in various places; all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. Then many will fall away and they will betray one another and hate one another. And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come

## **STORM BEFORE THE CALM?**

**ISAIAH 5:1-5**  
**MATTHEW 24:1-14**

There is a lot to unpack in these two scriptures so understanding the historical context in which they were written will help us to discern their

meaning. Though they are separated by 800 years or so, their theme is consistent. Isaiah was living in the post Babylonian era after the captives had returned home and Jerusalem had been mostly rebuilt. His focus throughout his prophetic work was upon the cycle of destruction, restoration, vindication and God's faithfulness. *O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you. I will praise your name for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful, and sure. For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the place of aliens is a city no more and it will never be rebuilt.* In those two verses, you can clearly see his interpretation of what he accurately perceived as an historical cycle: Storms lead to chaos which leads to rebirth and a new order of things. There is also a strong chord of accountability brought to bear upon those whose evil acts created the Storm in the first place.

There is the same cycle of events presented in Matthew. Understand that whoever comprised the material in this gospel was not one of the original twelve and simply adopted the name or had it ascribed to him by the early Christians. Indeed, he could not have been one of the original since he was writing well after 70 A.D. which is the year the second Temple was destroyed. In our passage, he is presuming foreknowledge of this event when he prophesies its occurrence. He also knows the fate awaiting

the remaining eleven disciples: *They will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death and you will be hated by all nations because of my name...But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations.* So here again we have the historical cycle of Storms, chaos, God's faithfulness and salvation.

Must we always have Storms Before we have Calm? It would seem so given human nature and the nature of the Universe. We often blame God for the messes we get ourselves into, but the scriptures make it clear throughout that we have the capacity for both good and evil, love and hate, war and peace. We have the impulses for all of it built into our DNA. And for whatever reason—which is not mine to divine—God has given us the gift of freedom of expression and choice. It doesn't wash to say, "The devil made me do it," when we know full well that we and we only are accountable for our actions.

And our nation is in a big mess right now. We have presidential primaries waiting in the wings and multiple criminal trials pending for our former president who aspires to be president again. These are going to create some major Storms—as if we haven't had enough already. We are fighting over so many issues it makes your head spin and we wonder how

in the world it is ever going to work itself out and get us to the Calm we all desire. But nothing is static in life or in history. The current place we are in will either get better or worse before restoration occurs. The war in Ukraine cannot and will not go on forever and it will likely take a decade or more before the cities are rebuilt. But they will be. And so will be the Hawaiian city of Luhaini.

There will always be anticipation for future good. And it really helps to be able to hold onto hope while the Storm is raging. And that requires a faith in a power greater than ourselves and beyond our comprehension.

*Therefore, strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and shade from the heat.*

I invite you to look at your own life—and the older you are the wiser you are because you have a greater perspective and can bear better witness to the Calm that comes after the Storm. Take a look at the crises you have faced and see the good that eventually resulted in the aftermath.

About 35 years ago I realized my first marriage was coming apart. And when it did, I went into chaos. Even though I was relieved to be out of a 19-year marriage that had become increasingly unhappy for both of us, I was now facing big problems. My financial situation was very fragile. I

took custody of the house which meant I had to meet all of the obligations home ownership requires. My income barely met my monthly expenses. And because my son was seven at the time, I had responsibility for my half of parenting and dealing with his many issues—and he had a lot! And then down the road there loomed the problem of meeting someone new or remaining single for the rest of my life. I was like a dervish whirling around in circles.

Over time, I got my balance and Calm and restoration followed. Both my former and I found new relationships and are very happy. I just had my thirtieth anniversary last April. And I have a son by this marriage and a daughter-in-law and future grandchildren who will be a wonderful blessing in my life. That son would never have been born if the Storm had not created the possibility.

There is a Spirit within us that never gives up. This is a universal truth of creation. It is all about evolution and rebirth whether it be in a natural forest fire that clears the way for young saplings to replace the older, decaying trees; even the devastation of wars that tear down old political structures and lead to more enlightened and equitable societies. And, of course, in our own lives that open the space for new growth. The point is, we cannot afford to lose faith in God's love and care which

supports us no matter what we are facing. *Indeed, those who endure to the end will be saved.*

Reverend Thomas Dunlap

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