

The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost, 14 November 2010
Saint James Episcopal Church, Tigard OR
The Rev'd Raggs Ragan, Rector

Today's collect is one of my favorites because it is one of the most thought-provoking and useful – as well as containing that always fun to say 'read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest'.

It challenges us to think about why we have scripture, what our relationship is to it, how it helps us, and on and on. What struck me particularly this time was the next clause: "that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life" It's all about hope – and how we live lives of hope. How do we share hope? How do we increase it? Can people recognize our hope by looking at our lives?

The collect echoes one of the most repeated phrases about hope: "the sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life"

Our lives are filled with questions about the future. What is going to happen to us? To our children? Our country? Our world? Hope makes life possible. Hope moves us beyond fretting to action. Visions of hope that we hold before our eyes help us to put one foot in front of another.

This collect reminds us that Scripture is in our lives to give us hope, to provide the visions we need to have hope. In our King City Bible study we have looked into the scriptures and found wonderful things. The explorations have helped individuals grow spiritually and even more have built a lively supportive community. Only one of the members who was there when I began four years ago is still part of the group, because the other members have all needed to move into assisted living or have died, but many new people have joined and the spirit of the group grows and thrives – and the questions are very present. Now we have begun studying Revelation, a book which is often used to try to answer that universal question: what will happen to us? Will we be OK?

Today's Gospel lesson seems more about where hope cannot be found, as Jesus talks about the approaching destruction of the Temple, and wars, insurrections, betrayals, and all manner of calamities. If I only read that passage, or only read one of the descriptions of disaster in Revelation, I would not be left with much hope. The hope comes from the relationship with God and God's community built up over time, through study and prayer and thought and exploration.

One of the most valuable sources of hope in scripture is in inspired visions such as we will find at other places in Revelation, and such as we find in today's two passages from Isaiah (the reading and the response we all read together). Both of those readings contain a sense of the catastrophic situations spoken of in the Gospel. Wars and insurrections and conquest and discord and personal calamity have

always been part of human experience. What Isaiah tells us is that God in the midst of us now, no matter how bad things are. This is a source of hope. We are not alone in our tragedies – nor will we be alone in any that may come upon us. Isaiah further assures us with his vision of an end to all the disaster. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.”

This does not answer the near term question: what will happen to us? But it does answer it in the long term. In the end, all shall be well. Everything will be put right. There will be an end to disaster.

All the talk of these assorted disasters tells us that we need to be careful about where we place our hope. The temple (and all its successor institutions) will be destroyed. Wars and insurrections and natural disasters will destroy much that we rely on. People will betray us and revile us and persecute us. So where do we put our hope – that cannot be taken away?

Most of us think of the big picture and wonder, but live life in the small picture, person by person, choice by choice. So where do we find our hope in day-to-day life and how do we live it out? How does it sustain us?

All week long, my mind has kept returning to Martin de Porres, one of my very favorite saints. He has just joined our Episcopal calendar in our latest revision, where he shares a day in August with Rosa de Lima and Toribio de Mogrovejo. But I think of him in November, where his death day is observed as his original Saints Day. We frequently celebrated him in school chapels around this time.

Martin was a person who lived life very much in the present, day-to-day reality, always with hope in his heart, and sharing that hope with many others. Martin was born in the late 16th century in colonial Peru. His mother’s parents were slaves brought from Africa to Panama. She was freed and taken as mistress by a Spanish nobleman. The nobleman abandoned his mistress and her two small children in Lima to live however they could. Martin’s mother took in washing and did whatever she could to feed her children. It was not a life brimming over with hope or promise. But Martin had a relationship with God from earliest childhood, which gave him great delight and encouraged him in his life of love and service. One of the famous stories of his earlier childhood was captured in a song written by a friend of mine, talking about how his mother sent her 7 year old son to the market square to get food for the family and how on the way back Martin managed to give away almost all of the food to beggars he passed.

His generosity was irrepressible – a joy to him and those he helped, but a frustration to the mother challenged to keep him and his sister fed. It was undoubtedly a relief to her when he had a bit of his own

money to give away. When he was just ten, he was apprenticed to a barber surgeon and showed great aptitude for healing. He was very happy at this stage in his life, as he actually earned money. So he could help people with healing, but could also share food and a bit of money with all the needy people he saw each day.

When he was 15, Martin sought admission into a monastery. Their rules prohibited a mixed race monk, but Martin was perfectly happy to simply be a servant to the monks. So he went to live with them and in his spare time used the healing arts he had learned to help others as well. His gift for healing became widely known so that people came from all over and would have taken up all his time, keeping him from his assigned duties. But Martin was always faithful, and managed to juggle the demands on his time.

Martin was clearly inspired by visions like Isaiah's of all creatures living in harmony. He used his healing gifts on animals as well as people and famously brokered a truce between a colony of mice and the monks. He had always enjoyed the mice and let them have some leftovers from the kitchen, but the monks began complaining about holes in their robes chewed by the mice. They wanted Martin to kill the mice. Instead he convinced the mice to stay out of the monks quarters, and to wait for him to bring them food outside each evening.

Throughout his life, Martin's holiness attracted and inspired people. He fed them, healed the, prayed for them, acknowledged each individual no matter how poor or scruffy. He made sure his mother and sister were safe and well. His grace and mercy benefitted countless people, rich and poor alike – and eventually he was made a monk despite the racial prohibition. Along the way he established an orphanage and attached children's hospital, as well as an animal hospital and shelter. He worked to sustain these in his lifetime and they lived beyond him, giving hope and care to countless children and animals.

Paintings of Martin typically include a cat, a dog, and a mouse all eating peacefully together, as in Isaiah's Peaceable Kingdom. Martin was and remains a shining beacon of hope. The hope that filled him gave him the courage and stamina to feed whoever came to him, never giving up because there were too many starving people. It gave him the faith to minister tirelessly during a terrifying epidemic, never giving up because so many people were ill. One day at a time, one person at a time. In Martin's case, one small miracle at a time.

When we invite people to join us in the church, that is what we invite them to: hope. Because of our relationship to one another and to God, we are able to share our experiences of boundless love and mercy, of hope and comfort in the darkest times, of the promise of infinite blessings, of visions of a world beyond destruction and calamity. We are able to share stories of people like Martin whose lives shine with hope and who model the kind of generous service to everyone that flows out of such hope.

And when the questions arise about what shall become of us, we can say that it may not be what we expect, not always what we want – but that in the end all shall be well. Amen.