

Fulfilled
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
May 28, 2017

Psalm 93

- ¹ The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty;
the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength.
He has established the world; it shall never be moved;
- ² your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.
- ³ The floods have lifted up, O Lord,
the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring.
- ⁴ More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters,
more majestic than the waves of the sea,
majestic on high is the Lord!
- ⁵ Your decrees are very sure;
holiness befits your house,
O Lord, for evermore.

Luke 24:44-53

- ⁴⁴ Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’
- ⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Prophecies seem to be one of those things that will always be a fascination for people. The Harry Potter books include a prophecy which declares there exists a boy who is capable of defeating Voldemort. The prophecy indicated the person would be male, would have

been born at the end of July 1980, would have parents who defied Voldemort three times and lived to tell of it, and would have a power that Voldemort could not or would not comprehend. It turned out that Harry Potter was not the only one who fit that description, which led to intrigue and suspicions about who really fit the prophecy.¹

On the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, there was a known prophecy of a vampire with a soul who would “play a pivotal role in the apocalypse”² and then be made mortal again. For years there was only one vampire with a soul but, as with any interesting plot twist, there came another and the true heir to the prophecy became an ongoing question until the end of the series.

For millennia there have been doomsday prophecies, with the most recently publicized one suggesting the world would end when the Mayan calendar ended on December 21, 2012. Well, you know how that went. We are fascinated with predictions of what is to come and we take what little information we have to try to build a case to fit what we are seeing around us. The book of Revelation continues to spawn speculation from those who would guess at the signs of the apocalypse. Today’s reading from Luke points back to even older biblical prophecies and we know that the ancient Near East was rife with them. Think about those who asked Jesus, “Are you the Messiah?”³ Monty Python’s *The Life of Brian* plays with the preponderance of messiah prophecies at the time and follows a man named, you guessed it, Brian, who is mistaken for the messiah and builds a Jesus-like following but not by any efforts of his own, while Jesus goes about his business around Jerusalem. Even Brian’s mother tries to tell the followers they’ve got it wrong when she tells them to go away, explaining “Now, you listen here! He’s not the Messiah. He’s a very naughty boy! Now, go away!”

We, with our human eyes and human minds, will look for signs and portents wherever we can find them, especially when we are seeking an answer. And I don’t think that’s inherently a bad thing, because it prepares us to be watching for God at work in this world.

¹ http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Sybill_Trelawney%27s_first_prophecy

² http://buffy.wikia.com/wiki/Shanshu_Prophecy

³ cf. Matthew 11:3, Luke 19.

It does mean, however, that we're going to get it wrong - a lot - as we can't seem to separate our human desires from what we are seeking. In the end, it will always take hindsight for us to recognize the fulfillment, and, in the case of the disciples in today's reading, Jesus spelling it out for them after his resurrection.

We read, "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."” Messiah suffer? Check. Messiah rise from the dead? Check. They had to believe then, just as surely as those had happened, that the scriptures' prophecy would come true through to the end. Repentance and forgiveness of sins were also going to be proclaimed in Jesus' name to all nations. For a minute - okay, for more minutes than I care to admit - I felt for the disciples because of the tremendous amount of pressure they must have felt knowing that they had to carry out prophecy: part two. After those minutes, I remembered that God had brought part one to fruition and, just as much, God would bring part two to fruition. Of course! After all, what does our psalm proclaim but that the Lord is more powerful than any human king, that even the powerful floods and mighty waters are no match for the Lord. Prophecy: part two? Check.

We obviously have a part in this. It's not like they proclaimed it to all the nations and were done. We know things get forgotten between generations, or diluted or misremembered. There remains, and always will remain, the need for repentance and forgiveness of sins to be shared as good news. And from generation to generation we humans have had ideas of how this is to look, this fulfilling of the scriptural prophecy about Jesus. I'd caution us to not put too much stock in our own certainty about how it is that we are to share the good news. Entire websites were devoted to how people thought the Harry Potter and Buffy prophecies would turn out, as well as for the doomsday prophecies in this technological age. Many, many guessed wrongly, and for a much simpler matter.

I suspect you've found in your own life that it doesn't much work to guess at what God is going to do. Instead, we save ourselves the worry and stress when we remember that God is working and we serve God when we open ourselves and give God permission and

invitation to act through us, to partner with us in whatever God is up to. I've recently started a yoga practice using a series of online lessons. In talking about the fact that some are beginners watching the series, and thus less capable of more flexible variations of some of the poses, the instructor said in a recent lesson "how lucky we are that we have so much to look forward to."⁴ I don't know about you but I have never looked at upcoming challenges as something I was lucky to encounter. She said it in a way, though, that made me think that I am looking forward to seeing how much more capable I become the more I practice. The more we give God permission and invitation to act through us, to partner with us, how much more do we get to be part of God's fulfilling of God's will? That's a nice way to look at it, I think. For all that is to come, how lucky we are that God is leading us into God's future. How lucky we are that God is partnering with us. How lucky we are that the first disciples trusted in God's power to fulfill with and through them.

Let us pray: Almighty Lord, guide us to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins however you see fit, we pray. Amen.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AakYeM23sI&index=11&list=PLui6Eyny-UzwxWCWDbTzEwsZnnROBTIL>