

Waiting in love, not anxiety

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This Sunday's texts from Daniel and Mark (and, perhaps, Hebrews) are quite apocalyptic in their outlook. This may lead most preachers to focus their attentions elsewhere—though post-election, many U.S. partisans may be feeling fairly apocalyptic themselves.

Jesus, too, lived in apocalyptic times. Many of his fellow Jews, including his relative John the Baptist, were convinced that the world was on the verge of a great apocalyptic judgment. In the gospel reading for this Sunday, Jesus has just predicted the destruction of the Temple—also hinting at the immanent onset of the end of the world as we know it.

Apocalyptic times invite urgent activity and anxious anticipation. We are invited to allow our fears to focus our actions and attitudes. This is a welcome response if your home is on fire or a bus is barreling down on you as you cross the street.

For the most part, however, fear can so truncate and focus our vision on such a narrow field as to render us almost blind. For Jesus, navigating one's way through apocalyptic times requires a clear vision, faithful insight and holy patience. Fear is the enemy of all of these practices for living faithfully in apocalyptic times.

Jesus' alternative to fearful, anxious living in apocalyptic times invites us to be like those wise people awaiting the bridegroom's arrival. We need a patient, yet ardent desire for God to arrive. This desire is not driven by a sense of triumphal vindication. Instead our desire for God's arrival is simply sustained by our love for God and our eager hope for communion with the one who loves us without reserve.

The more apocalyptic our present seems, the more important it is for Christians courageously to rely on love to cast out fear (1John 4:17). Relying on love to cast out fear is not simply a comfort to us. It can also be a service to the world. This week's reading from Daniel makes this point. When times are at their most turbulent, Daniel indicates that relying on love to cast out fear will both make us wise and help lead others to righteousness.

This may prove to be one of the greatest ways in which the church can offer service to the world.