

The day of the Lord

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November 10, 2014

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In [my Century lectionary column for this week](#), I wrote about Zephaniah 1 and 1 Thessalonians 5, with their shared theme of the “day of the Lord.” Zephaniah’s account is particularly fearsome, and it serves as important background for the medieval liturgical text “Dies Irae.”

I chose to focus on these passages because they are hard to hear. Initially they seem so alien, and yet on second reflection, their scenes of destruction are so terribly familiar. How do we address these difficult themes of judgment and destruction without either glorifying violence or co-opting God for our own pet causes?

The new Presbyterian hymnal *Glory to God* offers an excellent congregational song that might be paired with these texts: “Judge Eternal, Throned in Splendor” (#342). “With your living fire of judgment,” it pleads, “purge this land of bitter things.” A preacher might use this text in the sermon itself, or invite the congregation to sing it in response.

The more familiar hymn “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory,” better known as the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” also fits this theme, with its language of God “trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.” Singing it here could give people a fresh appreciation for the strong biblical imagery of judgment in this song.

If you are preaching or teaching 1 Thessalonians 5, in which Paul describes the day of the Lord coming “like a thief in the night,” I recommend looking at one story in

the children's book *Zen Shorts* by Jon Muth. In "Uncle Ry and the Moon," an older man is surprised one night by a robber in his house. Instead of reacting out of fear, Uncle Ry welcomes the robber and thanks him for his visit. When the surprised man tries to run away, Ry insists that he cannot leave empty-handed. The only thing Ry has to give is his tattered robe, which he removes and hands to the robber. The robber, bewildered, dashes off.

Uncle Ry then sits outside and reflects: "Poor man. All I had to give him was my tattered robe. If only I could have given him this wonderful moon."

1 Thessalonians 5 reminds us that we are not to live in fear of the day of the Lord. Instead, like Uncle Ry, we are to respond with love and generosity, as "children of the day."