

The end of the world (Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:36-44)

In the midst of anxiety, it can sound like an attractive option for a swift end to come.

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It's fair to say I've been on edge since the wee hours of November 9, 2016.

Surely there was trouble in the world before that day; I knew there was. But for six years now I have been living in active anticipation of the end of the world as I believed it should be, the direction I hoped for diverted in a detour to what felt like the bad place.

The vibes, as they say, have been bad, and so have the decisions, the results, and the trends. Some days held hope of a subtle shift in a more favorable direction, but many more have felt like a lurch toward disaster.

Much of this has played out in a world beyond face-to-face conversation, even before the pandemic, as people have kept to their like-minded pods, emerging only to yell at counter-demonstrations or school board meetings. That hasn't stopped me from feeling anxious about the ones who may be carrying weapons, whether physical or verbal, to church, or the grocery store, or the polling place. Yet I know from the tone of the wider discourse that my everyday queer life and progressive Christian beliefs seem as dangerous to some people as their values feel to me.

In Matthew's Gospel, we hear an apocalyptic vision that popular culture interprets as a vanishing of the righteous, but in these times it seems like it could be a plague or pandemic leaving only some alive instead. That moment will come like a thief in the

night.

In the midst of anxiety, it can sound like an attractive option for a swift end to come. Let Christ show up and handle it. Let God handle them, whoever they might be in my mind or yours.

Isaiah, though, offers a different vision of the end of the world as we know it. Nations will stream to the Lord's house on the highest mountaintop, he says; then and there God will judge between them, between us.

It's tempting to envision "them" finally getting the judgment they deserve, forced to turn over their weapons, whether material or spiritual, to see their weapons hammered into life-sustaining tools. They will want to hold onto what they have. What a comeuppance!

It's tempting—until I consider the weapons I hold onto for dear life: oratorical capacity, economic and racial privilege, social status, and more. Am I willing to lay down my sword and my spear?

What are we willing to lose in order to gain that mountaintop?