

November 14, 2021 – The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

**“Check out the real situation/Nation war against nation.
Where did it all begin?/When will it end? ... And everything is
just for a while./It seems like: total destruction (is) the only
solution/And there ain’t no use, no one can stop them now...”**

**Those are words penned by Bob Marley to his song “Real
Situation,” which appeared on the last album he and the
Wailers put out in 1980.**

**Baptized in the Ethiopian Orthodox church and better
known for his Rastafarian beliefs, I have no idea whether
Marley gathered inspiration from this apocalyptic Gospel
passage or not. He wrote other songs with unambiguous
Scriptural references. “By the Rivers of Babylon,” which draws
from Psalm 137 comes to mind.**

**Regardless, the songwriting draws out very appropriate
themes to the text. Apocalypse is derived from the Greek for**

“revealing.” Calling out war and destruction is revealing indeed. It isn’t – or at least it isn’t only – a peek into the future. But it shows what’s actually going on in the present.

The real situation.

Apocalyptic literature as a genre of the written word peaked in the years surrounding Jesus’ life on earth. It’s found in the Scriptures but there were certainly plenty of apocalyptic writings circulating in that era beyond what made its way into the Bible. Earlier examples dated back more than five centuries prior when the Israelites returned to the Promised Land after Cyrus and the Persians conquered Babylon, an exciting time for the people of God but also a chaotic one, plagued with growing pains, to put it mildly.

In Marley’s case, he knew his own end drew near, more likely than not. “Real Situation” was recorded barely a year before he died from a melanoma cancer he battled with for a total of four years. Like the ancient writers, he had been given

urgency for getting his words before his intended audience. This came as he headed down a path toward the end of life where it's common to gain insight as to how small a human being really is and how fleeting life is.

Jesus long ago took that path, with an expansive view of things we get only a glimpse of. But while he is on it, he has the company of his disciples who are easily impressed by the work of human hands. Don't be, he tells them.

Don't be awed by displays of power by institutions. They don't last. They can be here today, gone tomorrow. Do not be alarmed, Jesus says, when people take up his name for no greater purpose than having recognized its power ... and determined to exploit it.

Check out the real situation.

Truth is it's not all that cleverly hidden. Stop and take a moment to consider. Grandiose architecture is standard operating procedure for making a statement about power.

Capitals, government buildings, cathedrals, monuments all over the world have long been built to impress upon their viewers, we are big, you are much smaller.

War is raging some place on the planet all the time. In the nuclear era, the threat of war exists perpetually and no matter the arms treaty, the know-how can never be erased. It's just a fact of our existence we have come to live with.

And when war rages, it's often in the name of God. When power is sought, it's often with implications of God's endorsement. These are realities we have come to accept as normal.

Sometimes it takes a singular voice to speak to it all lying just below the surface of what we have come to know as our normal existence. And what many generations have come to accept as the human condition. You know this stuff, that voice says, you know how it is.

But it won't always be this way.

This is the promise to which we hold dear. It's the hope to which we cling in the middle of it all.

That the end is better than the beginning, when all these terrible things will be but a memory.

But boy, does the beginning seem like it takes forever when we are living in it. And it weighs heavily on us when we hear that it will get worse before it gets better. Yet we endure.

Jesus has seen us through such tumult before. He has seen many who came before us through as well. We can't lose sight of that, just as he has not lost sight of us, even when we worry and don't keep level-headed.

And we cannot change what *must* take place but we can change how we approach it.

I first became acquainted with that Bob Marley song not by hearing the original but by hearing a cover from Sublime, another group with reggae influences, that came along a decade and a half later, right at that pivotal time when the

music you love forms this nostalgic bond that sticks with you the rest of your life.

The singer, Bradley Nowell, changed one line in particular from the original: “There ain’t no use, no one can stop *us* now.”

Now kind of like Marley, he was an artist who wasn’t known for a Christian faith but had been influenced by it. As a kid, he learned guitar starting with his grandparents teaching him Christian songs.

I know I’m biased but his version sticks better with me.

No one can stop us now.

The powers of the world rage. Let them. They’ve been at it for a long time now.

But what will we do? We will wait and we will be the people God has formed us to be. The ones who know the real situation. That the power-hungry are fighting over power that doesn’t last. That only God can build anything to last forever

and we fight for that. For a reign of peace that humbles the proud and lifts up the downcast. For something very different than the broken world has long offered and which may come about little by little, but will not be deterred.

We will take small acts and know we are part of something so much bigger.

Amen.