

# Micro-dosing Hope

November 17, 2024

## **It's the End of the World As We Know It**

Being a preacher is a lot like being the weird old auntie who repeats her stories every time you see her. The moment you see her she launches in, "Did I ever tell you about the time..." and proceeds to tell you a story that you have heard so many times you could tell it yourself.

Sometimes, the stories we repeat tell us about what we hold most dear, like the fact that I know that I've told the story before about how, when I was in college, I took my grandma to breakfast most Saturday mornings, and each and every time she told me about how she and my grandpa met. Even as her dementia grew, it was a story she held on to.

Similarly for me, I THINK I've told the story from this pulpit before, about how the song I chose for my processional in Scott's and my wedding was REM's "It's the End of the World As We Know It." I chose it both as a way to make him laugh at a time I knew he'd be incredibly nervous, and also because of the ironic truth of it. After we marry, we're never the same.

I offer the same song to you today for the same reasons: to break the tension in a time that is so tense and fraught with emotion, both personally and societally, as well as to acknowledge the absolute truth. It is the end of the world as we know it.

The scripture reading we heard from Revelation today is often chosen by families when planning a funeral. It's beautiful and poetic and comforting. But most folks gloss over the first verse:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven  
and the first earth had passed away."

(Revelation 21:1)

The beauty and poetry and comfort of the subsequent verses is set up with the context that the first earth had passed away. Or, to quote Michael Stipe, "It's the end of the world as we know it."

So it is when a loved one dies. So it is when our socio-political world is upended. You may be in one or both of those situations right now, and there are some profound parallels. Whether our grief finds its source in the death of someone we hold dear or ideals we hold dear, a lot of the dynamics are the same: shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing, acceptance.

Last Wednesday, as the world was waking up, Brian McLaren, one of the leading voices of the Emerging Church movement, posted this:

Welcome to reality, friends.

I woke up this morning heartbroken and disappointed, like tens of millions of people. Today, I'm trying to face what reality is telling us.

Reality is telling us that people are sometimes wise and responsible, but sometimes people in large numbers make tragic mistakes with far-reaching consequences.

Reality is telling us that liars, con artists, and criminals can fool a majority of the people a lot of the time by giving them someone to blame and playing to their resentment and fear.

Reality is telling us that we humans all have biases and resentments that authoritarians can exploit for their advantage.

Reality is telling us that older generations, especially of white male Christians, don't want to let go of power.

Reality is telling us that while some of us have been waking up to our nation's racism, sexism, and environmental irresponsibility, others are digging deeper into denial.

Reality is telling us that our religious communities have, for generations, failed to teach basic critical thinking and ethical discernment skills to their members.

Reality is telling us that our political parties — all of them — aren't very comfortable with reality.

But there are other realities that are speaking too. The oceans are warming. The ice caps are melting. The poor and oppressed eventually will need solutions ... not just someone to blame or scapegoat.

It's important to remember: Reality isn't only what is. Reality includes potential for what could be.

Four billion years ago, the Earth was a hot molten lifeless planet. Nobody could have imagined it would some day contain coral reefs, Bach, Bob Dylan, and Beyonce ... and you.

In this chaos and disappointment is potential. We must become chaos artists, my friends, working with a mess to make something beautiful.

Welcome to reality with all its glory and squalor, all its heartbreak and potential.

Reality is heartbreaking, and it is also possibility. Reality is that people and systems and ideals and relationships die. That is the foundation that our scripture passage from Revelation stands on.

AND

The reason it is so profound is that it doesn't leave us there. When we are broken and shaken and rocked to our core, Revelation 21 gives us some bedrock beyond death and taxes: God's home is among mortals. God is with us, here and now, even in our darkest times. God will comfort us, will wipe away our tears. Even in our loss, God is working to make things new, working to help us stretch toward the reality of possibility even as we're mired in the reality of grief. God is eternal, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Our hurt and pain and struggle and loss are real. And, there is nowhere that we can go, no future that can happen, that is outside of divine love and grace.

My daughter's daycare happened to be closed the day Politico leaked the news in 2022 that Roe v. Wade was going to be overturned, so I was working from home as I cared for her. As I read the news, I openly wept big, sloppy tears. My 2-year-old could see that mommy was distraught, and so she pulled out her 2-year-old coping tools. She knew that when she was upset, we would often sit on the couch together and read. So, she toddled over to her bookshelf, and I kid you not, pulled the book "Baby Feminists" for us to read together.

She didn't know what she was doing. She chose a book at random. And yet, that tiny, providential act of kindness was so freeing. Reading about wisdom figures who have drawn our society toward grace and compassion and mutuality, that is, the Kingdom of God, was a balm.

I was still bawling as I then made her a lunch of all of her favorite foods and served it to her on my best China, even though she was only two, because I wanted to teach her that when we've been gutted, when we are in the depths of despair, we surround ourselves with beauty and we nourish ourselves for the resistance. When despair and grief and brokenness threaten to pull us under, reaching out for beauty – for flowers and sunsets and one perfect strawberry and Beethoven – can be a profound act of resistance, as it nourishes us to rise again when the time is right.

To riff on the passage I shared with you from Brian McLaren, it takes one of the feet we had stuck in the mire of reality and positions it in the reality of possibility.

Another voice who we can lean on amidst our grief and this chaos is sociologist Brene Brown. She writes:

Despair is a claustrophobic feeling. It's the emotion that says, "Nothing will ever change." It's different than anger or sadness or grief. Despair is tinged with hopelessness.

People who subscribe to power-over leadership often weaponize despair. They count on people giving up on themselves, their work, and each other.

I get it. I'm looking at people I know with suspicion. I'm questioning the value of my work. I'm wondering if courage, kindness, and caring for each other simply don't matter anymore. I'm desperate for someone to blame because blame is an effective way to discharge pain and it gives us a sense of counterfeit control.

The research shows that hope is a powerful antidote to despair. What's interesting, however, is that hope is not an emotion (C. R. Snyder). Hope is a cognitive-behavioral process. It's about having a goal, a pathway to achieve that goal, and a sense of agency or "I can do this."

Right now, the thing that is helping me the most is micro-dosing hope. I have no access to big hope right now, however, I am asking myself how I can support the people around me. The people on my team, in my community. How can I make sure that, in the maelstrom of my emotions, I stay committed to courage, kindness, and caring for others regardless of the choices made by others? Doing the smallest next right thing is hard, but sometimes it's all we've got.

### **Micro-dosing hope.**

What might microdosing hope look like for you? It might be buying a bunch of flowers and leaving them at the door of the widow down the street. It might be being honest with your family about why you've decided not to spend Thanksgiving at your homophobic uncle's house. It might be knitting hats to hang on the fence outside of St. John's shelter. It might even be as small as giving your dog an extra long walk, because she needs it (and if you do, too, it's a win-win).

When I talk about microdosing hope, it can be the micro-est of micro.

- A smile.
- Letting someone merge in traffic.
- Folding the laundry your partner left in the dryer.
- Adding an extra bag of groceries to what you normally donate to the Blessing Box.
- Acknowledging to your neighbor that you see their pain.

Again, even the tiniest acts of hope are fuel to combat despair.

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**Revelation 21:1-6, Luke 6:20-31**  
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