

Woe to you who are alive now, for you will be dead.

The candles surrounding us today like a great cloud of witnesses remind us of the same truth proclaimed by the falling temperatures and the turning leaves: life changes, and changes again, and the living die.

Cycles and seasons, beginnings and endings are part of the gift of life, whether we like it or not.

This is good news for the destitute and the despairing, the hungry, the hurting, the ones rejected and refused by an unrelenting status quo.

Systems resist change, of course, whether they are nations or families, churches or communities or societies, groups of any and all sizes, so the poor stay poor and the rich protect their interests with the power they are careful to guard.

But autumn and death and the unbidden grace of God come for us all.

The candles flickering around us represent people of many strata of society, a wide variety of ethnicities and stories and socio-economic situations, the whole spectrum of human sexuality and personality and religious orientation.

Only two things unite them: they are beloved, and they are dead.

Woe to you who are alive now, for this shall also happen to you.

The prophet Daniel had nightmares about four kings rising from the dark underbelly of the earth.

He woke up sweating and shaking, like a Democrat on Wednesday morning.

The attendant, however, does for Daniel what Jesus does for the disciples in today's gospel: he widens the view.

The kings, ugly and arrogant and ferocious as they are, will come and go like winter.

The kingdom will remain, however, with the holy ones of God, or in Jesus' teaching, with the poorest of the poor.

Jesus says this, Luke notes, from *a level place*; this is the beginning of what Bible scholars have termed "the sermon on the plain."

We usually hear about the sermon on the mount, which is Matthew's account of it, where Jesus blesses the poor in spirit from up high.

That's the way we prefer it, of course: Jesus looks more like he is in charge and less like he is in our face, and most of us can claim poverty of spirit much more convincingly to ourselves than we can claim to be poor.

For Luke, however, God's good news runs deep and shakes the system, flipping the status quo on its ear, down side up.

What Mary sings in chapter one Jesus proclaims in chapter six, not just in words of promise and warning, but also in his posture and position.

He preaches from the level place, the place where God is taking us all.

A place where we are all equal.

A place like death.

The bumpy topography of reality, with its peaks and valleys, will fade like political power and summer's foliage, Jesus promises, so blessed are those on the bottom and woe to those who are on top, because both are going to be on the move.

God will equalize us all, in death if not sooner, to prepare us for the kingdom to come, the kingdom that will finally last.

Jesus is so confident of this that he invites his disciples to live into this reality now, to lean into God's future with conviction and courage in spite of the resistance of the present.

*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you, give generously, do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

It is the way Jesus chooses to live, and the way Jesus chooses to die.

It is the way forward, the way of tomorrow's enduring reality, the way of God's kingdom.

It is the way God behaves with humanity.

Jesus invites us to follow him into God's level and lovely future, to practice living now the seemingly weird but wonderful way that God has designed for us to live forever.

We celebrate saints because they demonstrated the courage to accept this dangerous invitation.

Saint Francis of Assisi discovered joy and peace in renouncing his wealth and embracing a life of poverty and humility, which led him into deep communion with creation.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta gave to everyone who begged from her.

Saint Martin of Atlanta shepherded a nation in the direction of God's kingdom with luminous language and tired but persistent feet.

Saint Frank of Chicago, whose remains grace our columbarium, shepherded me with his vision of this faith community.

He and his partner Richard joined Resurrection because, in his words, it welcomed gay people without being a gay church...it was a church, a spiritual home for anyone and everyone, a level place that, at its best, treated everyone with equal respect and welcome.

Frank also leaned into God's future, leaving a generous bequest to Resurrection that became a sizable foundational piece of our current Mission Endowment Fund.

Now we look back on Frank and all God's saints with wonder and fondness, with a smile in our hearts and water in our eyes, but Jesus refuses to let us linger with our nostalgia and tears.

Blessed are you, he tells us who are weeping now, for you will laugh.

Do not look back at the saints, because they are not behind you--they are ahead of you.

They have died, which is where you are going too, and now they are in that lovely level place which is the kingdom coming, the immediate and eternal presence of God.

Which is where you are going too.

Blessed are you who are dying, for you will be truly, fully alive forever.