

Advent, Day 6
Read Rev. 1-3

Friday, December 7

"...and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet which said, 'Write...'" Rev. 1:10

NEW START

He was already old by that time. His ministry had been long and eventful. He had never wavered in his faith, even in the face of persecution. The growing opposition did not cause him to keep quiet. The empire, realizing that to silence his voice would simply serve to make him a martyr, decided to quietly send him away where he couldn't cause any immediate problems. So they exiled him to the prison island of Patmos. They reasoned that he would last long enough there that his leadership would finally be annulled and people would forget about him.

Maybe John, himself, was even relieved. He could spend his remaining days there in relative ease. He wouldn't always have to be looking over his shoulder, wondering when his door would be splintered and he would be taken for trial and death. Even exile might have a certain appeal late in life. At least he would know his fate.

But it seemed that God was not yet finished with John. There were still some things that needed to be said.

The Book of Revelations is a strange book. Much of it is written in a coded language whose images mean very little to those of us reading it away from the time in which John and the early church found themselves. We don't fear possible persecution. We are not under the thumb of a tyrannical ruler. We have freedom to worship when and how we please. We are not concerned about being picked up by the authorities for distributing dangerous and heretical materials.

As a result, we may have become soft in our faith. We are safe and secure and our faith may have lost the urgency that comes with new understanding which is held in the face of opposition to it.

We have allowed faith to become ordinary.

We need to remember that it is not.

Annie Dillard writes:

Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up batches of TNT...Ushers should issue life jackets and signal flares on Sunday morning. They should lash us to our pews...

That was the kind of passion with which John wrote from his exile in Patmos. The whole purpose of his writing was to inspire those people who were reading his words to never give up and never grow stale in their faith. They should never give up because God has never given up on us. His images of the empire and of the power of God would serve to re-ignite the faith of many who had grown complacent, or who had begun to lose their resolve in the face of growing opposition and persecution. He reminded the people of who was really in charge. And it wasn't Caesar.

We might need to be reminded, too, of the transforming power of faith. We might need to be kick-started again and rediscover our purpose. Annie Dillard is right. We sometimes forget how powerful the love of God released on the world can be.

Worship is on Sunday.

Grab your crash helmet and join us.