The CATHEDRAL of ST. PHILIP
SERVING ATLANTA AND THE WORLD

6/22/2025

We Were Told It Was Going to be Like This

an article for the *Cathedral Times*
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Once again we feel taken by surprise; caught off guard by current affairs. But the daily news remains remarkably similar to events that were familiar to our forebears. Bible readers in particular will find this phrase so well known that it's almost trite: 'In the last days.' A key word search—in-the-last-days—will turn up memorable verses that foreshadow the way things are right now.

From Genesis in the Hebrew scriptures, to Revelation in Christian texts, it's all there in print. Doomsday preaching has become such a stock expression because it's one way to go 'back to the text.' The literary term 'Jeremiad' exists because the prophet Jeremiah simply excelled in the same job assignment as many others; so that his name now signifies doom and gloom personified. In myriad other ways we inherit generations of prophetic preparation. Therefore: 'Prepare ye' in our lifetime to get used to the chaos and disruption that also impacted our ancestors' lives; 'yea verily' for many ages past.

But in the few paragraphs below I'd like to try a different art of persuasion. The technical term is epideictic. In the field of rhetoric it means ceremonial speech or writing. It's used on the occasion of a ceremony that praises or blames someone or something, in order to persuade or dissuade an audience to approve (imitate or emulate) or disapprove (censure) someone or something. It's familiar to most of us in the form of eulogies or obituaries, and it's typically found in funeral orations, in graduation and retirement speeches, in letters of recommendation, and in nominating speeches at political conventions.

Biblically the Book of Revelation provides a compelling example to me because we've spent a year or two translating it in our Cathedral Greek class. The author provides stunning denunciations and commendations that regale the audience with powerful images alongside sacred texts. Twenty-two chapters engage us with vivid and flamboyant rhetoric to do or become—what? To become a witness for the end-times—to bear witness to, or testify to, or perhaps even martyr oneself in loyalty to—One who is coming to judge the world. All of that is on-offer to us in the Good Book as 'grist for the mill.' That is, all that chaos and disruption provide perfect opportunities for authenticating our profession of faith.

"Get on board, little children," comes to mind in the words of the old African American spiritual. "The gospel train's a-coming," repeats the refrain. To paraphrase: '*Here's our chance!*' That's the attitude and disposition of the apocalyptic Christian. But let's not rely on biblical inspiration alone. Consider one other legendary example: a democratic version of epideictic rhetoric.

> "Adams and Jefferson, I have said, are no more. As human beings, indeed, they are no more. They are no more, as in 1776, bold and fearless advocates of independence; no more, as at subsequent periods, the head of the government; nor more . . . aged and venerable objects of admiration and regard. They are no more. They are dead. But how little is there of the great and good which can die! To their country they yet live, and live forever.
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> They live in all that perpetuates the remembrance of men on earth; in the recorded proofs of their own great actions, in the offspring of their intellect, in the deep-engraved lines of public gratitude, and in the respect and homage of mankind. They live in their example; and they live, emphatically, and will live, in the influence which their lives and efforts, their principles and opinions, now exercise, and will continue to exercise, on the affairs of men, not only in their own country but throughout the civilized world."
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> —Daniel Webster, "On the Deaths of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson," 1826; source:

thoughtco.com

Let’s ‘get on board,’ friends of Christ and fellow citizens, because ‘there’s a train a-coming.’

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