

Lent, Day 15  
Friday, March 22, 2019

Revelation 8:1–5

In public speaking, not speaking is just as important as speaking. It's called a "pregnant pause." To speak without break or pause would tire your audience. Every once in a while you must stop to give your audience a chance to catch their breath. It is also a very effective tool to let your audience know that you've come to an important point in your speech. To pause is to draw attention to what has been said, what will be said, or both.

After the first six seals, the interlude, the marking out of God's people, and the vision of their post-martyred comfort we have the opening of the seventh seal. Then a deep silence. The voices of the saints go quiet, the song of the four creatures goes silent, and the choir of the heavenly angels goes silent. Heaven stands in holy hush. It's the moment.

In that silence the prayers of God's people come up before God. All those who have cried out to God under the strokes of the anti-God powers now come up for justice to be done. It is time for God to deal with the world. And, so, the seven angels are given the seven trumpets which will produce plagues on the earth like the plagues of Egypt leading to the great Exodus.

God responds to those prayers. Fire is taken from the altar and thrown on the earth. This is not wanton destruction. Think to Isaiah's commissioning in Isaiah 6. The coal from the altar is brought to his lips to purify the unclean man of unclean lips among a people of unclean lips. This fire being thrown to the earth is to purify, not to destroy. Of course, to purify is to destroy that which is not God's. The same way that a surgeon cuts out a cancerous tumour. This is necessary for the remaking of the cosmos.

From the earth's perspective God's acts of judgment are thunder, lightning, and earthquake.

Perhaps sometimes we wonder if our prayers do any good at all. Here we have the answer. Yes, they come up before God as incense. He hears them and he responds. His mercy is great—thank God! But his justice will not delay forever. There is coming a day when he will set all things right. In the meantime we may only hear the rumblings of God, but we can know that he is moving. Perhaps, in the times when we're most desperate, we need to simply join the holy hush so we can hear God aright.

Prayer

God of mercy and of grace, thank you for your long-suffering of us. Thank you for your sure deliverance and justice. In our dark times remind us of your present love and your coming justice. Amen.