

Suffering Produces Hope

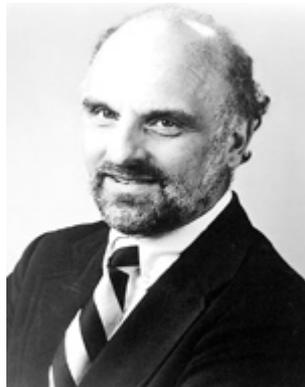
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It is odd that folks should meet together in Baltimore on a Thursday night in April to reflect upon hope, especially since we in the United States seem already to have everything, and need hope for nothing more. And yet, it is not odd that Jews and Christians should meet together--on any occasion--to think about hope, because Jews are the most elemental hoppers in the world, and, in decisive ways, Christians have learned about hope from Jews. And so, we Christians hope with Jews. When Jews and Christians hope together, moreover, we express our shared oddity, for we hope, characteristically, in a context that is either satiated and indulgent, or in despair and incapable of hope. Either way, hope is a distinctive act that belongs to us together.

I The Context of Loss

It is correct to say that the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. at the hands of the Babylonians, and the exile that followed, are the defining realities for ancient Israel in the Hebrew Bible. There surely were people in Jerusalem who never departed, but in the liturgical and imaginative life of emerging Judaism, the loss of home, the displacement that followed, and the apparent loss of God, were the defining realities--for that generation, and for all generations to come.



The text shows, in many places, that coming to terms with the loss of Jerusalem was the overriding intellectual and religious agenda of ancient Israel. Indeed, coming to terms with that loss has continued to be an overriding Jewish agenda, even until our own time. Ancient Israel "came to terms" with these losses as it did with all loss: by its capacity to tell the truth about itself--to claim the

loss, and to express publicly and repeatedly all the hurt, the grief, the rage, the doubt, and the bewilderment of what it means to have the focal center of life and the engine of faith taken away. With the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., Judaism became a people displaced from its center and true home.

In a very different way, and yet strangely parallel, Christians are defined by the huge, massive loss of that dread Friday we call "good." As Israel had invested the city of Jerusalem as its center of possibility, so Christians, for reasons we ourselves do not fully understand, invested the person of Jesus with the same cruciality. Jesus became for Christians the peculiar carrier of God's promises in the world in a way similar to the way Jerusalem had become for Jews the embodiment of God's possibilities in the world. Early Christians were compelled by Jesus, and they struggled about how to speak of him. They called him many names out of their Jewish repertoire, among them "Messiah/Christ," by which they meant to say that Jesus was a human agent who carried and implemented God's dreams for the world. As Jerusalem signified possibilities for peace, justice, freedom, and security in a Jewish world, so Jesus was seen from the start by Christians as a revolutionary force for transformation in the world.

So Jesus went to Jerusalem--that is the great decision and great journey of his life--and there he encountered all the forces of resistance and status quo because that is how an urban center tends to work; and there, eventually, he was executed by the Romans as a trouble-maker. Just as exiled Jews pondered the loss of Jerusalem, so Christians pondered the death of Jesus. Indeed, half of the gospel story in the New Testament is about that final week of his life: from the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to the supper and the trial and the execution. And then darkness and turmoil.

Among exiled Jews the end of Jerusalem unleashed huge visions of disorder, for Jerusalem had been the power of order that held the threat of chaos and disorder at bay. And so, in exile, they sang of their beloved city:

. . . though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of
the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult
. . .
God is in the midst of the city;
it shall not be moved (Psalm 46:2-5).

In much the same way, early Christians saw in Jesus a power to fend off disorder. And then came death and darkness and earthquake and terror. In ways we do not understand, this loss of Jesus became the key confession of the early church, symbolized among Protestants by a cross, and among Roman Catholics, by a cross with the body depicted as either suffering or in triumph. And the mantra of Christian faith became "Jesus, and him crucified."

Now it is important, as we meet together, that Christians understand better than we do why the loss and recovery of Jerusalem are pivotal for Jews; and that Jews understand better why Christians can go on and on about Friday and Sunday. But I suggest that--together--we have a more important, shared agenda, more important even than our understanding each other, namely, that Jews and Christians--even together--do not live in a vacuum. Jews--with the enduring loss of Jerusalem--and Christians--with the enduring death of Jesus--live in a culture that is now defined by loss, and, therefore, I propose that *our peculiar and shared traditions of loss are a huge resource for faith and life in our time.*

The loss, now among us, that touches everything public and personal for everyone, conservative and liberal alike, includes:

- the failure of the old social fabric, now deeply in jeopardy;
- the failure of the old consensus of intellectual certitudes;
- the failure of old patterns of privilege and domination that we count on;
- the failure of economic viability--except for the privileged few--so that "down-sizing" of claims and possibilities goes on everywhere.

So now we--together--must engage in what ancient Jews did in Babylon, and what ancient Christians did in Jerusalem and in Galilee: embrace the loss that is more than can be imagined. We are the people who know loss best because it is definitional in both our traditions. We are the people who know best what it is like to give up what is

over. We are the ones who are entrusted with resources to help our communities and our society move beyond the loss.

Now, as then, there are some who engage in denial and nostalgia, imagining that not much is happening, that the loss is not deep, not permanent. . . except that

Jerusalem really was gone;
Jesus really was dead;
old patterns really are over: no denial; no nostalgia.

Now, as then, there are some who engage in fantasy and in irresponsible private actions, out of touch with social reality. But then--get this!--some, in the loss of Jerusalem, and some, in the death of Jesus, engaged in massively buoyant acts of recommitment to the future. It is that massive, buoyant act of commitment to the future that is our proper agenda and our proper topic. And here I reflect with you on that agenda.

II The Primacy of Memory

The primary ingredient--and primary resource--of faith that is indispensable in a season of loss is active, determined, concrete, resilient memory. The loss of Jerusalem and the death of Jesus might have resulted in forgetting and abandoning. But, of course, they did not. Jews and Christians did not forget; they did not abandon. Rather, each tradition engaged in an intense and disciplined recovery of the past.

It is now believed that Judaism--in exile, and just after--engaged in a massive reconstitution of memory that led to the formation and codification of the Torah. The materials of the Torah are, of course, very, very old. But as near as we can determine, it is precisely in the sixth century that the Priestly traditions codified the holiness rules that caused Judaism to develop internal disciplines of odd fidelity. And it was the traditions of Deuteronomy, linked to Moses, that codified the rules about widows and orphans and illegal immigrants that made Judaism into a community passionate for social justice. All this, as near as we can tell, among exiles who grieved Jerusalem. And, of course, we know the deep, enraged resolve of the Psalmist:

How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,

if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy (Psalm 137:4-6).

In that moment of the priests and the Deuteronomists, the whole of the book of Genesis was gathered--all the mothers and fathers, all the tales of barrenness and hopelessness, all the miracles of sons and daughters born, all those tales that remind us that the entire past of Judaism is a collage of miracles from a good God who does not quit--even in the face of profound loss.

It is in exile, or soon thereafter, that we get Psalm 136, a liturgical chant for Jews that remembers the classical story: everything from creation through Egypt and Pharaoh and the Red Sea and the good land. And all the while this dominant memory is being recited, the congregation is saying, after every half verse,

ki l'olam hasdo,
ki l'olam hasdo,
ki l'olam hasdo,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

God's faithfulness, God's fidelity, God's loyalty last always, even now, even in exile, even in loss. It is not different among early Christians who reorganized their lives around the Friday loss. They could not understand the defeat of Friday any more than Jews could understand the loss of Jerusalem. But what those early Christians did--just like the Jews that they were--was to build their loss into a stylized memory which was soon transformed into liturgy, for Paul writes early on:

"I received from the Lord what I also hand on to you,"

which is Paul's way of retelling the established formula. This became the classic formulation of the Eucharist--the church's great festival of thanksgiving--for "he took bread, gave thanks, blessed and broke and gave." And then in this festival of suffering love, they said:

"this do in remembrance of me (I Cor 11:23-24).

Eucharist is a remembering, and since that time Christians have, in this liturgical act, recited the great deeds of God, the great miracles of creation, the ancestors of Genesis, Exodus, land, culminating in Jesus. Of Jesus, they remembered his acts of healing and forgiving and cleansing and feeding. Thus, this festival of thanksgiving and of suffering love connects the death of

Jesus to an act of remembrance in which this community recalls its life saturated with goodness and mercy of miraculous proportion. For all their differences, the cadences are in harmony:

For Jews: "for his steadfast love endures forever;"

For Christians: "this do in remembrance."

Both communities resisted forgetting. In the midst of loss, both communities remembered that life consists in powerful acts of generosity and transformation on the part of God that cannot be explained, acts of generosity and transformation that we call miracles. In the midst of loss, our two communities recited miracles as a refusal to forget.

Now I tell you this because in our society, which is in the midst of profound loss--of a world we have trusted and that is no more--we face a deep amnesia. For Jews and Christians, loss evokes memory. For the society around us, loss evokes amnesia . . . and the outcome is a society without reference, without buoyancy, and without staying power for things human.

I suppose the temptation to amnesia is broad and deep and complex among us:

- the temptation for grandchildren of immigrants not to remember the price paid for being here;
- the temptation of African-American grandchildren not to embrace the costs of the civil rights struggle or the massive racism in its midst;
- the temptation of Jewish children not to want to take the time or the discipline to live either the possibilities of Torah or the pain of the Shoah;
- the temptation of the affluent not to remember the suffering that has produced structures of freedom and procedures of justice.

The list goes on--the loss of the concrete; the embarrassment of the particular; the irrelevance of rootage--and the great lever for amnesia is televised consumerism in which everything is reduced to now, to commodity, to private gain and individual comfort, to thin humanness, while all the density of communal miracles and communal particularity is lost.

It is not our business tonight to do a cultural critique of society, except to notice what a seduction and a temptation this culture of amnesia is to Jewish faith and to Christian

faith. For without vivid, concrete, nameable memories of miracles, we are out of business. But, of course, the truth that our communities hold in common, but do in very different ways, is that we are indeed passionate communities of memory who experience seasons of loss as seasons of passionate memory.

III Suffering Produces Hope

Now I come finally to our proper theme. Our two communities are twinned in loss; our two communities are twinned in memory. The loss in each case has evoked memory. I do understand that this twinning in loss and in memory is not fully commensurate, for Christians have been for a very long time not only dominant, but abusive and oppressive, while Jews have been for a very long time subservient and abused. I understand that historical reality and do not take it lightly. But our work just now is to see if we can reclaim the twinning of loss and the twinning of memory in ways that will keep us twinned in hope.

The amazing thing about our communities of faith, evident in our common life, is that memory produces hope in the same way that amnesia produces despair. Ponder that: memory produces hope. We Jews and Christians are people who recall the defining memories and miracles of their lives. We hope in and trust the God who has done these past miracles, and we dare to affirm that the God who has done past acts of transformation and generosity will do future acts of transformation and generosity. By a profound, elemental, and unshakable trust, Jews affirm that the deep loss of Jerusalem did not disrupt God's power and resolve in the world. By a profound, elemental and unshakable faith, Christians affirm that the deep loss in the death of Jesus did not disrupt God's power and resolve in the world. And that is the key issue in hope. If our embrace of God's past is thin, we may imagine that God is now defeated. If our embrace of God's past is thick and palpable, we will continue to trust in that same God.

We watch while those Jews in exile took their memories and turned them to the future. Right in the middle of the poetry of the Book of Lamentations--the poetry of deep loss and sadness--the poet is ready to quit:

Gone is my glory,
and all that I had hoped for from the Lord
(Lam 3:18).
But then this--an invitation to newness--only

three verses later:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

The Lord is my portion, says my soul,
therefore I will hope in him (Lam 3:21-24).

This voice of Judaism in loss recalls God's steadfast love (*hesed*), God's compassion (*rahamim*), and God's covenant faithfulness (*'amunah*), and therefore 'I will hope in him.' These three words--*hesed*, *raham*, *'amunah*--are the three great, pivot words of faith: steadfast love, compassion, faithfulness. Israel in exile recalled these, recalled concretely how God had acted, recalled miracles of fidelity. And then Israel in exile uttered this stunning affirmation about the future: '*al-ken*, "therefore." The "therefore" is the turn that believing people make from past to future, affirming that the future is surely to be shaped and governed by God's steadfast love, God's compassion, and God's abiding faithfulness. The future is not a shapeless void. The future is not a chaotic barbarism. The future is shaped by God's gracious transformative miracles, as was our past.

That same Isaiah in exile famously declares:

Do not remember former things,
nor consider the things of old.
Quit reciting ancient miracles. Do not be
locked into that old, precious remembering:
I am about to do a new thing,
now it springs forth,
do you not perceive it (Is 43:19)?.

God is doing something new that is congruent with God's past actions, and faithful, discerning people are able to see, to notice, to embrace, and to receive that newness as it is given by God. And then this poetic tradition of exile fills out the future in acts of buoyant imagination: even in times of barbaric imperialism, God is giving newness. God will stay with it until God has brought the world right.

I want you to observe this extraordinary claim that is being made in the face of evil, disorder, social chaos, and imperial abuse: God has not quit; God will make it right, because God will yet do what God has always already done.

In the prophetic imagination of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and later Isaiah, moreover, there are many scenarios of God's good future for Israel. This material is all poetic imagination. We call it "prophetic." If you like, you can

say it is "inspired by God." But at least you must imagine little groups of displaced Jews listening to these poets with their fabulous, determined visions of how it might be:

- Ezekiel envisioned a restored temple in Jerusalem;
- Jeremiah enjoined a new covenant with Israel, wherein God would completely forgive and start again with this people;
- Isaiah anticipated a wondrous, triumphant homecoming to Jerusalem, led by a victorious God who has defeated Babylon.

All these poets invited Israel beyond the concrete circumstance of their lives to a world that was soon to be enacted by the word of God.

I imagine these people deep in loss and deep in memory, gathered to listen to something like Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream speech. It is a dream rooted in God's own passion, a dream that tells of God's resolve to make things new, undeterred by circumstance. As you know, King's Dream speech was of things he could not explain; it was a vision that defied and overrode circumstance. People of hope are always people who so embrace the promise that they will not settle for present circumstance. So these exiled Jews--the most passionate, the most faithful--took these dreams and hopes as the truth of their life. They acted toward that future.

It is not different with the early church. The early Christians had engaged so deeply with Jesus and were so sure he was the quintessential carrier of God's goodness, that they knew Friday was not the end. The tap root of Christian hope is that they turned the old memories of Jesus toward the future. The one who had healed the sick, had forgiven the guilty, and had raised the dead would do more. As they made that turn, they arrived at Easter, the tap root of all Christian future. In the Easter event lie all the hopes of the Church. Easter is not an act of magic anymore than Jewish homecoming is an act of magic. It is, like Jews coming home, a miracle wrought in God's fidelity. Those early Christians came to know in the Easter event that God's power embodied in Jesus is still on the move in the world. Jesus is still summoning and inviting and recruiting people to subscribe to his passion for God's future in disciplined ways. As Judaism emerged in the long and unfinished process of homecoming, so the church takes its life in the Easter conviction that what was begun

on that Sunday is powerfully underway as God's good resolve for the earth.

Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, studies the amazing miracle of Christian hope, and articulates a stunning calculus of the life of faith:

We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rom 5: 3-5).

This statement is expressed in Christian cadences, but it strikes me as close to the core of what makes us distinctive together with Jews:

suffering . . . endurance . . . character . . .
hope . . .
and hope does not disappoint us.

This is the speech of a community that refuses to give in. It is the speech of a community that refuses the present loss as the last truth; a community that knows that God is not finished. God is not finished, and so Christians, in the tensive claim of the Eucharist, where we say, "Do this in remembrance of me," also say after Paul:

As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes
(I Cor 11:26, ital., mine),
which is a Christian way of acknowledging that things are not finished, and God must yet complete the future that is now beginning.

The capacity to turn memory to hope in the midst of loss--a capacity that is defining for Jews and Christians alike--is not a psychological trick. It is a massive theological act that is not about optimism or even about signs of newness. It is rather a statement about the fidelity of God who is the key player in our past and in our future. And therefore, when the good news of the future is announced to the exiles, Isaiah in exile asserts:

Here is your God: hinneh eloheken (40:9).
Your God reigns: malak eloheka (52:7).
And, in parallel, Jesus asserts:
The kingdom of God has come near;
repent and believe the good news (Mark 1:15).

The two statements are completely parallel. Jewish hope and Christian hope are grounded

in the reality of the God who will and does work newness.

Hope wrought out of loss and suffering by way of memory is an appeal to God. But the world of amnesia, which is a world of denial and nostalgia, has little access to God. In this world, God does not appear to be a live or relevant player, and where God is not a player, as Dostoyevsky has seen, "everything is possible"--everything brutal, everything greedy, everything violent--because greed, brutality, and violence are the fruits of idolatry and atheism, the fruits of a world without God. Such acts and attitudes and policies are the work of those who do not remember steadfast love, compassion, and mercy. It is the work of those who seek to have their future on their own terms. And so we Jews and we Christians, in a society of atheism and idolatry, are always again deciding about God's future among us.

IV Us and the Others

These "hoppers"--Jews and Christians--were people in demanding and difficult circumstance. And so they asked, first and inevitably, how will this effect us? Hope tends to stay very close to home.

On the one hand, hope for Jews in exile was focused upon the recovery of Jerusalem and the rehabilitation of Jews in the homeland. The text is saturated with that hope, and of course, that preoccupation, so deep in the text, clearly is at work in the politics of the state of Israel and a variety of Zionist claims. It could hardly be otherwise, then or now, given the long story of brutality. So Jews in exile imagined and hoped for and counted upon a recovery of the land and the city, perhaps as a gift of Cyrus, the Persian, and a lot of human courage and cunning and initiative.

The amazing thing is that in the midst of such justifiable preoccupation with self and community, these same lyrical dreams are not narrowly for the community. There is a spill-over beyond the community, because in the end, this is God's future and not the future of the Jews. And so, for example, the book of Isaiah is framed in chapter 2 with a vision of all nations coming to Jerusalem for Torah that will make peace possible:

Many peoples shall come and say,
Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord . . .
For out of Zion shall go forth Torah
and the word from Jerusalem . . .

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more (Is
2:3-4).

This vision is indeed of Jerusalem, but there is no hint of Jewish privilege in this prophetic vision. It is a gift of God in Jerusalem, but a gift for the whole world, a gift that must not be kept as close monopoly.

Chapter 2 of Isaiah is matched by chapter 65, at the end of the book, about a new Jerusalem, a new heaven, and a new earth that exult in the new rule of God that touches everyone, everywhere, from Jerusalem on out. No doubt the urgent issue of our hope is to adjudicate promises for us and promises beyond us.

On the other hand, Christian hope, too, was hope for the world. Except that these earliest Christians, who had risked a great deal by being seen in public with Jesus, were concerned for themselves. You can see in the gospel narratives that while they were making large, loud claims for the risen Jesus, they were also creating narratives by which to gain power in the early movement. We can see that Peter is the dominant engine of the future in the early church. While he is remembered as having denied Jesus at the trial, claiming not to know him, there is competition in the narrative to claim who got to the Easter tomb first, and at the end of John (21:15-19), Peter is treated to special address as the coming dominant power in the church. And so the special celebration of Peter in Matt. 16:18 is much prized by Christians--Protestants and Catholics alike:

I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matt 16:18-19).

Now my reason for dwelling on this is that the concern for the control of the future life of the church seems to me parallel to the Jewish preoccupation with Jerusalem for Jews. And in the Christian tradition as well, while there is much that is turned in on the church, there is also a reach beyond the church to the world, insisting that the Gospel carried in Jesus of Nazareth is not for Christian preeminence or domination in the world, but rather it is affirmed that in Jesus of Nazareth, God's good governance of all

creation has begun in a fresh way. And so in Christian faith, there is an endless juggling act of Christian hope to adjudicate promises for us and promises beyond us.

I do not suggest that the cases are parallel, but I do suggest that for these two communities of hope, the same tough issue is present in both, although in very different forms. As we become anxious, the tendency is to focus on the promise to us, when in precisely those times, it is the promise beyond us that matters most.

In both Jewish and Christian faith, because these communities of hope are concrete, identifiable, institutional entities, there is an easy readiness to draw the hopes of God toward us--toward Jews, toward Christians--because of our awareness of the fragility of our historic communities. But this readiness lives in tension with another awareness. Because our shared and common hope is in God, it is clear that these hopes cannot be fully packaged in and filtered through us, but reach to the world in practices of *hesed*, *raham*, and *'amunah* in ways not managed by us or by our communities.

V Us and Beyond Us

This tension of us and beyond us may take yet another form. It is clear that for both Christians and Jews, the dominant form of hope is prophetic messianism. That is, it is a hope that will come to fruition in the historical process, for the historical process, and by human agents. In the loss and recovery of Jerusalem, that human agent is variously identified as Nebuchadnezzar or Cyrus, or, eventually, Ezra. These are known human agents who will do God's work in the earth. And there is clear evidence that the prospering of early Judaism depended upon the funding of the Persian empire, a very human enterprise. In Christian hope, the matter is parallel. For all our doctrinal formulations that are endlessly problematic, it is the core claim of Christianity that the human person of Nazareth, whose name and family and home town are known to us, is the agent of newness. Post Easter, post Pentecost, it is the spirit of Jesus that brings the future. I suspect that all of us would hope through such human claims, Jewish or Christian.

But, of course, there is more. There is more because these expectations have not worked out so well. Jerusalem was not--on anybody's schedule--recovered in that ancient world: a huge and definitional

disappointment. And so, in the emerging work of Rabbinic Judaism, there was a hope that pushed beyond the prophetic, beyond the messianic, beyond human hope, into another realm of discourse and into another realm of expectation. That hope is called apocalyptic: a theology and a literature of a cosmic clash between forces of good and forces of evil who fight desperately for the control of the future. In this great cosmic conflict, the community of Jewish faith is not a participant, but only a bystander who awaits the outcome with confidence.

Apocalyptic literature of the period is "serious literature" that assures the faithful that they may be confident, because while the struggle is deep and violent, the outcome is sure, and the faithful need only trust and be at peace. The rhetoric of this faith is enormously imaginative, voicing images and symbols that are outside the normal scope of human discourse and imagination, the kinds of images, symbols, and phrases needed to talk about a conflict that is out beyond us: out of reach, out of access, out of control.

It is important to recognize that this literature, for all its very peculiar character, is a theological act of hope. It is a candid acknowledgment that for an interim, perhaps a long interim, the struggle will be hard, with violence and disorder. But the outcome is sure: God will win and we are safe! That is its theological claim, though it arrives at that point in ways we think odd.

The rabbis who ordered the Hebrew Bible, on the whole, looked upon this discourse in negative ways. They found it odd and offensive, inviting extremity. For the most part, they were able to keep it out of the Bible, to muster biblical hope in more reasoned discourse. But they could not completely omit it, so it is there in Jeremiah, Zechariah, and especially Daniel. And the reason they could not keep it out is that the times were so desperate, the needs, so intense that some required a faith that could match the crisis in its intensity and shrillness. Thus the rhetoric matches the crisis, for it goes deep into the reality of chaos and disorder and there finds the God who is perfectly capable of defeating all that threatens life. It was clear to such voices that common-sense and ordinary faith would be no match for the threat, and so it was essential to go deeper.

It is not different in the New Testament. The central claim of the church is that Christ's spirit is at work to bring God's rule among

us. But that early church lived in a context of enormous threat and despair, in which this literature and this hope is massive in its daring claim. The early church fathers, like the early rabbis, sought to organize the New Testament for a different sort of faith. But they could not do so, first, because of the context, and second, because the cosmic victory claimed for Christ over the powers of death and chaos would not be derived from present action, but would be a deep and profound newness that had to come from outside. And so they imagined, appealing to the book of Daniel, that the newness of God would come like the intrusion of a cloud entering the atmosphere. They strained to find language that would express this utter otherness of the God who would win and keep us safe.

So there is in the mouth of Jesus a warning and an invitation that God's rule will come suddenly among us--abruptly, violently--to bring the world to joy and obedience:

Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake." (Mark 13: 35-37).

The early church sang in its deep expectation:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord
and of his Messiah,
and he will reign forever and ever (Rev 11:15).

The hope of the church, derived in form and content from the hopes of Judaism, is that the present trouble will be overcome by God's good rule. In the end, God will win and we will be safe.

Now this matter of apocalyptic faith that lives at the edge of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament warrants our attention for three reasons:

12. Apocalyptic faith is more than a little embarrassing for those of us who are urbane and sophisticated in faith, for it violates our more respectable reason.

13. Yet, it makes assertions that are pivotal for our faith, because we Jews and Christians trust deeply in God's future, and we need a way of rhetoric to speak our faith.

14. But this rhetoric of apocalyptic is profoundly open to distortion and abuse. The theological verdict that "God will win and we

are safe" is an unthinkable gift that admits that things are beyond our control, but will turn to the good. The rhetoric is candid to acknowledge that God's control is not yet visible and in the meantime there is acute threat and violence.

It is a wrong move--and an easy move--to conclude that we must participate in the violence in order to assure the victory of God. Such a practice--now evident in many places (among them the vigilante in this country, supported by Christian zealots and echoed in other places by Jewish zealots)--is a deep betrayal of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic faith, for it confuses our engagement in violence with the deep faith that leads to watchful, confident, quiet waiting. I am aware of the problematic of such a claim--to wait and hope--given the rich history of waiting, resistance, and violence. Whatever judgment may be made on strategic grounds, we should at least be clear that the faith we share is not a faith in human violence, but a trust in God's governance in and through whatever violence evil may do. I suspect that we shall continue to struggle in our faith communities with this matter, struggling with the claim that God's power and God's governance do indeed redefine our life, and we are permitted neither to quit nor to despair nor to seize life in our own hands, as though God were not present to us.

Jews and Christians are indeed people who wait in confidence, recognizing that our agendas are profoundly penultimate and not ultimate. What we are now able to face, as we have not before, is a common waiting for the gift of God that has not before seemed to us to be common. I do not imagine that we can easily, or if ever, overcome the sorry history of Christian domination and Jewish suffering. That fact will linger. What we may be able to see, however, in growing contexts of trust, is that the good gifts of God's governance are an important equalizer that permits no violence toward each other. Newness is grounded only in the God who will win and who will keep us safe, but the winning is not our victory.

VI So What?

I have tried to trace our common inheritance of hope that rises from memory in loss. What I now want to ask is, so what? Does hope make any difference? And, of course, the answer is "Yes," or we would not be thinking

about it together as we are. But let me say what that difference is.

People who hope are not people who have a vague sense that things will work out all right. People who hope are those who know the name of God and the characteristic gifts of God: hesed, raham, and 'amunah, the three great qualities that eventuate in shalom. People who hope have complete confidence in God's coming shalom, a rule of order, peace, security, justice, and abundance. Without denying any present disorder, confusion, or distortion, people who hope, watch, wait, pray, and expect, know that God's shalom is as good as done. People who hope are people who act in the conviction that God's future is reliably "present tense" and act upon it before it is fully in hand.

The future is not in hand, but it is at hand, and therefore we count on the winner who has yet to do the winning. We--Jews and Christians--need to be asking: what happens "present tense" if God's future is secure? And the answer is: God's future is enacted as present neighborliness. If God's future is not sure, then the present ought to be shaped and propelled by greed, injustice, exploitation, brutality, and barbarism. These are the fruits of an atheism that believes there is no future from God. These are the fruits of an idolatry that has God all confused with militarism, racism, sexism, ageism, and ethnic privilege.

We Jews and Christians, however, have no truck with such self-serving atheism or such self-destructive idolatry. The commands of Torah are rooted in God's coming. Jesus, of course, was fully instructed by rabbinic teachers when he named the two great commandments. They asked him which one was the most important. He said, "Love God and love neighbor." They said, "We only asked for one." He said, "You cannot have one. You always get two. You always get the neighbor with God." And, of course, the rabbis knew that long before Jesus . . .

Now we live in a society that wants to separate God and neighbor, to keep something of God without the neighbor who comes with God. But, of course, we cannot, because God's coming shalom, which is sure for the world, is a gift of neighborliness, and so widow, orphan, illegal immigrant, poor, homeless, disabled, homosexual--all those not like us, all those who are threat and inconvenience, all those who are citizens of

God's shalom--count in the way we trust in God.

I speak to you about an emergency and you know it is an emergency:

- The emergency is that the human questions have almost been forgotten among us.
- The emergency is that the collapse of the human fabric of our common life fates us to violence.
- The emergency is that the creation is jeopardized by our anxious greed. Jews must look to the state of Israel and its endangerment. Christians must look to the church and its vexed future in the West. Those are our close engagements. But Jews and Christians are always to look beyond ourselves and beyond our local needs and our local claims, because in the end, the future belongs to the God of hesed, raham, and 'amunah . . . eventually, to shalom . . . and not to us.

The Psalmist confesses:

Not to us, O Lord, not to us,
but to your name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and your
faithfulness
(Psalm 115: 1, ital., mine).

And Paul echoes:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph 3:20-21).

We are so different in our utterance: "not to us" . . . "to him who is able." But we are so alike. We have all things in common:

remembering together,
hoping together,
neighboring together,
set together in God's generosity,
God's transformation,
God's miraculous shalom . . . coming soon.