

Easter VI Year A 2026

The prophet showed up at the church office mid Tuesday morning this past week. He said he wished to have an urgent conversation with the pastor. He drove a decrepit Toyota Corolla that was laden with what seemed all his earthly possessions. He wore an Ozzie Osborne T-shirt. He carried several manila folders neatly packed with the usual apocalyptic fare... religious tracts depicting the second coming of Christ... An AI rendering of the mark of the beast... signs and wonders heralding the end of times. "Have you heard of the 9-11 prophecy?" he asked. Before I could answer, he said that God had called him to engage as many pastors as he could to begin the ushering in of Christ's second coming; that the world was coming apart, and that only Jesus's return could set things right. He wept. I proposed to him that perhaps Christ had already returned, his life manifest in those who follow him... he wasn't listening. He carried on... that we needed an army to defeat Satan; that Satan now ruled the world. He left as abruptly as he'd arrived. I felt for him. Felt his despair.

He was a caricature perhaps, I mused, of the premillarianistic ethos that has so dogged the church over its life. Premillarianism is the belief that the world is so captured by its sin, its depravity, that only the second coming of Christ can save it. And that his coming is consigned to the last days of earth, an event reserved decidedly for the future. In the meantime we languish here on earth, and dream of heaven. If not the apocalypse, that is yet to come, alas, then salvation comes in the next life. His despair, his grief for the state of things, was palpable. Though his mind clouded, he was sincere.

The former Rector of Nativity Church Dothan, my home parish, had a tee-shirt he wore from time to time. On the front it said, "God is dead." With attribution to the coiner of that phrase, Friedrich Nietzsche, the great 19th century German philosopher... "God is dead," Nietzsche, (on the front) and then on the back of the tee-shirt was the phrase, "Nietzsche is dead," God. That's probably all most of us know about Nietzsche. The atheist movement in western culture, now all the rage, holds him as their patron saint, as it were... But Nietzsche was no atheist... He was lamenting the emergence of a dark nihilism that so characterized his world... indeed, characterizes our own. Nihilism being the idea that there is no meaning or purpose in life; that human existence is a mere random biological accident or coincidence. Despair its calling card... and Nietzsche saw despair all around him despite the technological advances of science and industrialization. He attributed this emerging nihilism to humankind's addiction to self-interest and violence... and he felt strongly that institutionalized religion was complicit; which had made the church darkly irrelevant... Nietzsche would go on to say that the reason God is dead is that we killed him; that the mythology of a loving God seeking good for the world was utterly undermined by our self-interest and violence that springs from the modern obsession with ego and self.... That for me puts the meaning of the crucifixion in plain view... that is, the murder of goodness in the name of the status quo, a world order driven by self-interest. History, if history has taught us anything, has taught us that the powerful will do anything, anything to stay powerful; that greed is insatiable, and that both power and greed lead to violence.... That may not be absolute truth, but it is at least true over the last four

thousand years according to historical record... and of course now we are seeing this same tyranny play out in our own country... Do not doubt that this crisis of tyranny in our political system is a tyranny against God... a murderous tyranny because lives are quite literally at stake... Our potential as a nation to serve the greater good is at stake... the rule of law is at stake... The Self-interest of a few threatens our very democracy that upholds above all else equality and justice and hope.... This is the fruition of nihilism about which Nietzsche prophesied... if life has no meaning, no greater purpose; if God is dead, then it's every man for himself.... It is why our institutions are crumbling: government; healthcare; education, capitalism; religion... all falling apart... up and against the misguided labor of a godless and murderous world... a world that wills itself ignorant and uninformed to assuage the guilt of its heedless pursuit of self.... This is a death worse than death, itself, T.S. Eliot laments. And not without notable exceptions the church has been mute in the face of this addicting nihilism... And woe be unto the Franklin Grahams of our world; and even more woe to those of faith who choose to remain silent in the face of such brazen heresy. Jesus, in Luke's Gospel, referred to the state, the emperor, as Satan... think on that.

But brothers and sisters, we do not belong this world. We have been baptized into a new order, a true order... we are people of the Resurrection, and thus we are people of life... And, I believe, it is times like these that are our finest hour. We are the Baptized, people initiated into a community that holds sacred the lives of all people... We believe that life does indeed have a purpose, that God has a purpose... to give sight to the unenlightened... to set

free all who are captive, both figuratively and literally... to do justice, to love kindness, to feed, to clothe... to bear each other's burdens... to bear God's gracious commonweal to the world... to raise the dead... the metaphor John uses is the washing of feet. That is purpose people!... that is the purpose for which Jesus gave his life; and his legacy quite simply is that we are to do the same, no less than he.

Karl Barth, considered among the greatest of twentieth century theologians, after experiencing the exponential violence of the First World War, declared that God was 'wholly other;' that God was so far removed from the human community due to its violent nature, that God is in essence unknowable; that blind faith, my paraphrase, is all that we have in this life... Barth of course was greatly influenced by Nietzsche... and all he could muster in the face of the hot and dry winds of modern nihilism was a cry of despair that in the end God would save us from ourselves. Premillinarianism.

But we dear friends, as Christ's risen body, are resurrection and we are life; and resurrection is a present reality; it leaves to God's improvising imagination the future. The end times are now, good people. We are taught by the ancient ones, through Holy scripture, our sacred story, that our faith is not a blind faith... We claim a faith of clear vision... we practice our faith with open eyes, open hands, and open hearts. Jesus teaches us that God is indeed knowable... not understandable, but knowable. There's a difference; that if we keep God's commandments, that is, to walk in the Way of Jesus, then we abide in the intimate love and knowledge of God... In short, we take care of each other, we bear each other's burdens, we do

justice, love kindness... those are the means of abiding in God, as John puts it... this is no blind faith, but a faith in which the truth and joy of God are apprehended in the practice of love... Does that mean that to be in God eliminates the stress and strain of life, our problems, the slings and arrows of what it means to be human? Of course not... But it does mean that we live with high purpose, with meaning, with agency... We must resist the powers and principalities that oppose the good... We are to engender God's reign in unlikely places and unlikely moments even amid the world's ruin. We say in our baptismal covenant that we will resist evil, and that when we become compliant with it, we repent and return to God. That is the rhythm of the life of faith

“If you love me you will keep my commandments.” Jesus says, according to John. So that means we stand for peace and justice, and equality, and shared wealth... we take care of outcasts... we welcome the immigrant... we practice extravagant hospitality... we raise up the cast down... and we stand against exclusion... we stand against elitism... we stand against racism.... We stand against falsehood and tyranny... we stand against all things that kill the life of God... Don't doubt that our complicity in such things is an act of crucifixion.

The promise of Jesus to his followers on the night before his arrest and death, is that this work we do we never do alone... we are joined, one to another, by the best of bonds... Those bonds are the Spirit, the Advocate, who will accompany us in the trial of the world; we are united in the bonds of love, which will never leave us comfortless, bonds that will never leave us to despair, bonds that always keep hope alive... because our God is not dead but

lives... Our God lives for us, among us and through us... for all who will see, to see.... and no deathly tyranny can stand against these bonds... because we know in our heart of hearts that love is stronger... and that love is so very much alive.... And that truly... All shall be well at the end... and the end is upon us: A beginning.