

Today, Tammy Heilman gets what she purchased at our Raise the Roof Silent Auction. Today, she, and all of you, get a five-minute sermon!! So, because I only have five minutes, I am going to get right to the point. Today's gospel was **not** written to predict the end of time! It is an apocalyptic reading and it was written to help people stay faithful and live with a sense of courage, hope, and comfort when they were facing times of great anguish. These gospel words were written in the late 80s for early Gentile Christian communities facing persecution and times of great suffering.

In this reading, Jesus seems to be communicating a message that says **suffering** becomes an opportunity for testimony, and God will supply the words that need to be said. He says suffering provides an opportunity for those who have been changed to really tell of their **hope** in the depth of their struggle. Such **hope** bears **witness** to the God who is deeply present in the depth of suffering and pain.

So, today I share a story, just one example of such **testimony** and reliance on hope and God's presence in the depth of great suffering. This story tells of the witness of African American musician, Thomas Dorsey, who was the composer of the well-loved hymn, "Precious Lord, Take My

Hand.” Through this hymn that has become a gift to the world, Dorsey shares remarkable testimony that was born out of loss, grief, and chaos. Born in Georgia in 1899, Dorsey was the son of a Baptist minister and he became a prolific African American songwriter and gospel and blues musician. As an adult, he moved to Chicago where he found work as a piano player in churches, theaters, and clubs. He struggled to support his family by balancing his work between playing in clubs and churches. But, he ultimately devoted his work exclusively to the church.

In August of 1932, Dorsey left his pregnant wife in Chicago and traveled to be the featured soloist at a large revival meeting in St. Louis. After the first night of the revival, Dorsey received a telegram that simply said, “Your wife just died.” Dorsey raced home and learned that his wife had given birth to their son before dying in childbirth. The next day his son died as well. Dorsey buried his wife and son in the same casket and withdrew in sorrow and agony from his family and friends. He refused to compose or play any music for quite some time.

While **still** in the depth of despair, Dorsey said that one day as he sat in front of a piano, a feeling of peace washed through him. The following words just **came** to Dorsey as gift as he sat there:

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand;

I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light;
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.

In the depth of his suffering, Dorsey's words were **honest** testimony about his experience, yet words that communicated a trust and hope in the One who walks with us, even through the most difficult and chaotic times of life. These words came to him as **gift** and they became a **testimony** and gift to the world.

As we presently face various forms of natural disaster, climate change, political uncertainty, personal struggles, and a deeply troubled and warring world, we can remember and trust that, **no**, these things do **not** necessarily mean the world is coming to an end anytime soon. What we **can** trust is this: **Jesus tells us God is always with us and gives us the strength to endure and remain faithful.** We can remember that the words we speak in times of trial and challenge **will** come to us as gift. Christ possesses a wisdom our troubled world and Christ's troubling opponents **cannot** calculate or even begin to comprehend. Christ **will** speak the Word of God's kingdom through Christ's church, of which we are a part. And, that Word is the creative and redeeming Word that created **all**

things in the beginning and **continues** to create in its speaking as we allow God to work through us, the Body of Christ in this place.