

Some people seem to see God everywhere.

I don't mean those optimistic souls who slip 'Jesus' into every sentence or accost random strangers to ask them if they have given their life to the Lord. I mean more the beautiful sunset, rain drops on kittens, something so beautiful must be God's handiwork sort of brigade. Even the most hardened atheist can feel a sense of the numinous in the presence of beauty, though the last thing they will do is want to ascribe it to a deity. Probably a malfunction in the old brain chemicals or that out of date yoghurt I thought it was a bit dodgy or something like that. Still when wonder and awe come to call it's when we're most likely to think we might be welcoming angels. All well and good, but rarely does anyone observe the less pleasant side of nature- a slug say or a fox taking a dump on your doorstep or the plague bacillus or a Conservative Home Secretary (that's a list in descending order btw) rarely does anyone observe the less pleasant side of nature and see God's providence at work in the world, but there must be some who do.

Common it is to see God at work in the world when good things happen to us: when we are healed of a disease or are successful at an interview or some other good fortune comes our way; a rarer person it is who can see the work of divine providence when the doctor calls you in with an unpleasant prognosis, or when a BMW driver (isn't it always) trashes your motor by some act of thoughtless idiocy or when the news breaks that after many years when you thought he might have actually died, Cliff Richard is about to release a brand new Christmas album. Oh yes. A warning: if anyone thinks it would be a laugh to slip one into my stocking this year- the Cliff Record that is- it's not, and it wasn't in the least bit amusing the last time somebody tried it- and - be warned- she's now resident no more than 100 yards away in the churchyard. These things are not connected, of course. Absolutely not. And no the Rectory doesn't have a new patio. But it could...

That said there are some faith-filled souls who like to imagine that when a new and disfiguring disease is rampaging through the cramped tenements of humanity or when floods wash away centuries of careful construction in an instant or earthquakes bring to nought the arrogant Ozymandius dreams of a civilisation, then those religious seers think they see God's avenging angel bringing justice to a corrupt and sinful world. The angel in these cases is always somewhat cack-handed in that the good, the bad and the indifferent seem to be equally punished because of a record turnout this year at Teeside Pride, and fire and brimstone never seems to result from oppressing widows and orphans or not welcoming strangers or letting poor people

starve or other things God really cares about, but it always seems to rain firmamental sulphur because somebody somewhere is not punishing already persecuted minorities hard enough. But hey, God works in mysterious ways and only they know what it all means.

But aside from that at best mistaken and at a worst malevolent minority with the hotline to God there is a way in which all Christians, from the fluffiest liberal to the hardest line Puritan, from the Pope to Paisley, not only see the hand of God in an encroaching cataclysm but are actually celebrating it and cheering him on.

Still, never mind, 'It's not the end of the world'. That's what we say when we want to cheer someone up: the end of the world, now that would be something worth getting upset about, this little earthquake, partygate, electric bill that's wiped out your savings, isn't that bad when you look at it like that is it? It's not the end of the world.

It's supposed to bring you some comfort— it could be worse, it could be the end of the world. But for Christians, it not being the end of the world can only bring disappointment. Fair enough it might be cause of some apprehension, fear, trepidation, but the end of the world is what Christians are actively yearning for.

'It's not the end of the world'.

Oh that's a shame. As Christians we're quite looking forward to the end of the world. In fact we're *really* looking forward to the end of the world. Just me then?

No. Not just me.

Every time Christians meet together to worship, from eucharist to evensong, from baptism to wedding to funeral, every time we raise our corporate hearts to God we pray the Lord's Prayer. Thy Kingdom Come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. You know that means the end of the world, don't you?

When we gather together with bags of beans and pasta and tinned octopus in the Food Festival at Harvest time, that great celebration of God's goodness and plenty, loved by young and old through the ages, did anyone tell the children what it was actually about? Didn't you notice the readings were about the angels out in the

world, separating the wheat from the chaff, sickles swinging and wielding the scythe for the Lord. You know that means the end of the world, don't you?

Every time at the end of November when Christians desperately try to slam on the brakes too late before the world implodes in a holly-decked vortex of consumer madness and celebrate this season of Advent, when we're looking forward with eager anticipation to the second coming of Christ, you know what that means, don't you. We're standing here in church crying 'End of the world? Bring it on.'

Lo! He comes with clouds descending.

And.

That's all folks.

The end of the world.

That's what we're waiting for. That's what we're looking out for. That's what we're eagerly anticipating, crossing our fingers for, can't sleep I'm so excited about.

The end of the world.

Humans are not very good at losing. We hate it. Study after study shows that we'll do anything not to lose; even to the point we'd rather not have it at all in the first place if it means we're eventually going to lose it. In pseudo-scientific, we are loss averse; in every day we hate losing stuff.

And that's what we think of when someone says 'the end of the world': everything that will be lost. Everything that is. Everything that has ever been. Everything we had, everything we loved, cherished, adored. Gone. Look at it like that and Christians are just being amazingly, wilfully perverse wishing for that. How could anyone want that heartbreak? How could anyone stand all that loss? Well, yes, if you put it like that.

But.

That's not how Christians put it, is it. The end of the world isn't about loss, it's about gain, infinite gain.

You'll be hearing it read at a church service soon.

*The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

That's not the world as we know it, is it? That's a new world, and for there to be a new world the old world must pass away.

*I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."*

The advent of our God.

The end of the world.

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus, Come.