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Last weekend Chris and I had the privilege of attending a nephew's wedding in Mexico.

As we arrived in the coastal town of SAYULITA, where the ceremony was held, the celebration of DIA LOS MUERTOS—the DAY OF THE DEAD—had just ended, but evidence of the festival was everywhere.

Built on the scaffolding of ancient Aztec rituals and the Christian traditions of All Saints and All Souls, DIA LOS MUERTOS draws people back to their places of origin…
…where nightly parades weave their way through decorated streets
…and families gather at the town graveyard to share food and drink and stories with their BELOVEDS, who have left this life for the life beyond but are not forgotten.

It's a tradition deeply embedded in the Mexican soul. (BTW, if you're having a hard time visualizing what I'm talking about, check out the movie COCO—it'll help.)

We arrived in Sayulita at dinnertime, and following the recommendation of our host, made our way to a restaurant on the central plaza, where we had a clear view of the huge 40 foot female skeleton dressed to the nines for the festival.

Everywhere we went in town in shop windows and along cobbled streets, colorful flags and artfully rendered skulls served as constant reminders of DIA LOS MUERTOS.

But the purpose of the skulls and skeletons was not to incite FEAR or FOREBODING, but to CELEBRATE that—for these few days—the veil separating life and death was lifted and communion with those who'd crossed over was possible for a time.

Our experience in Sayulita has given me a new lens for looking at the texts that are before us today.

Each year in November the lectionary readings plunge us into the heart of the apocalyptic sections of scripture—and testimonies about END TIMES.

The Day of Judgement, earthquakes, famines, wars, betrayals—it's all on the menu—with high stakes at every turn. Indeed, everything seems on the verge of falling apart.

On Stewardship Sunday these are not exactly the good news messages we were hoping to hear!

And yet, as we drill down into these texts we find two questions embedded there that are as germane to our time as they were in Jesus' time:
- **How do we live in a world where so much we depend on doesn't last?**
- **What do we hold on to when the world as we know it is crumbling around us?**

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As we emerge from the longest government shutdown in history these questions are more than academic.

And the same was true when Luke wrote his gospel 50 years after Christ.

- The destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman military was seared in collective memory.
- The schism between Jews who embraced Jesus' message and Jews who rejected it was growing more volatile.
- Families were being split apart.

Every sign you could point to suggested that the world was going to hell in a handbasket and that there was precious little anyone could do about it.

So when Luke describes what Jesus saw and what he said as he moved through the Temple courts that day, there's no doubt Luke's audience is listening intently…
…Hoping for something to hold on to; something that wouldn't fall apart,
that wouldn't be taken away, dismantled or destroyed.

And do not we, in our own time, long for the same?

Our systems are failing us. Our leaders have lost touch with what matters most. Institutions that were created to help us collectively navigate rough waters are being dismantled while others are springing leaks right and left.

As a result, public care systems, economic systems, social-ethical systems, and natural ecosystems are showing signs of stress and, in some cases, collapse.

Now, truth be told, some structures in our country and world NEED to be dismantled:
- corrupt and arrogant systems that chew up lives and spit them out like refuse,
- unjust systems that stack the deck in favor of the privileged and powerful while pulling the rug out from under those least equipped to handle it.

The shutdown has exposed vulnerabilities—not only for federal workers but for all who depend on stable, consistent, helpful, and unbiased accompaniment from people who genuinely care.

As we look at the state of our nation and world there is so much to grieve.

But while telling the truth about the human condition today, Jesus doesn't leave us in our grief. He leads us toward hope.

Even as he tells his disciples that the world as they know it is about to turn, he gives them a promise:

DON'T BE TERRIFIED, he tells them, NOT A HAIR OF YOUR HEAD WILL PERISH.

The thing about new beginnings is, they often feel more like death at first than birth. And Jesus doesn't deny this.

In fact, he invites and even warns those who would follow him that death is exactly where he's headed because it's only through dying that resurrection becomes a possibility.

> **Truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.[1]**

TRUST ME, Jesus says, THERE'S NEW LIFE WAITING ON THE OTHER SIDE.

Sounds a bit like DIA LOS MUERTOS to me.

When all hell breaks loose in our world and in our lives. When no stone is left on another. When it feels like life is being dismantled bit by bit, KEEP YOUR HEADS UP, says Jesus, because something new is breaking in.

Friends, this is God's way—making a way when there is no way!

Gloom & doom may be signs of the times, as they have been in each generation since Jesus. But Jesus doesn't preach gloom and doom. He preaches hope.

> **Keep your head up. Don't be afraid. I will give you wisdom. You will endure.**

As we gather at the Table this morning, we'll hear again the words which attend this sacred Meal each week:

> ON THE NIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS HANDED OVER TO DEATH,
> OUR LORD JESUS TOOK BREAD AND GAVE THANKS…

On the eve of the death he knew was coming, Jesus offers himself—body and soul—to feed his community with gifts of forgiveness, hope and healing…
…so that they in turn will share these gifts and so sustain a weary world…
…and not only SUSTAIN it, but TRANSFORM it.

[1] John 12:24

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When Brother Martin was asked, WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF THE END OF THE WORLD WERE TO COME TOMORROW? he replied, I'D PLANT A TREE.

The God who became enfleshed in Jesus is not a God of destruction, but a God of NEW LIFE, who offers himself freely and completely, and calls us to do the same, by…
CULTIVATING FAITH…
WALKING HAND IN HAND WITH NEIGHBORS…
SEEKING JUST RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALL PEOPLE AND ALL CREATION…

This is our mission!

And getting there means not succumbing to a theology of escapism or passivity, but rather conforming our collective life to Christ's promise that we can participate in the in-breaking of God's reign, God's new order even now.

Friends, that is a mission I want to be part of;
that's a mission I'm ready to invest myself in!

A mission grounded in grace and founded on hope. Let's go there together.

Amen.