

-There is an interesting sociological theory called “3rd Space theory” which was started in the late 1980’s by sociologist Ray Oldenburg. 3rd Space Theory in a nutshell is pretty simple. Basically there are two types of spaces in a human being’s life that are most common: 1) Your private space (home, cabin, media room, etc.). This is space where you can be yourself without the risk of judgement or pressure, safely away from the outside. 2) Your public space (work place, local pub, walk the dog to the park, etc.) This space is where you fulfill the important human traits of socializing and communication. Humans are by nature, social creatures, and we need social stimulation in order to be healthy and whole. Oldenburg goes on to suggest there is an important “third space” that sits in between these common two. In his book, *The Great Good Place*, he goes into great detail on what “third spaces” are and the impact they provide. Third spaces are technically public, but they are also a “home away from home”. Third Spaces are designed for people to gather like public spaces, but they are geared more for deep dive conversations/sharing and less about simple “social clique or pack building”. Oldenburg, in presenting his theory, offers a list of (for him) Third Spaces that in his words are pivotal in “providing for [civil society](#), [democracy](#), [civic engagement](#), and establishing feelings of a [sense of place](#)”: coffee shops, barber shops (especially in the southern US), public libraries, community centers, and yes, churches and faith communities. These are spaces where the lines between public and private life become blurred and actually benefit our lives.

-Third Space theory (I know Damion our church resident sociologist probably knows more about it than I do), I believe is a fascinating lense with which to look at our apocalyptic scripture and psalm today. “The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.” (Psalm 16: 5-6).

-This psalm was written by someone who clearly was looking for the divine in new ways. Most likely written by someone who was living in Babylon in what we refer to as the “Babylonian captivity”, this is a person who is seeking a new hope from blurred lines.

-During my seminary internship, I led a bible study for senior citizens who lived in a senior living complex right next to the church. It was there that I met Margie, a 90 year old woman who came from a very rough family and outlived her money. Not able to afford her house anymore, her son moved her into this senior living facility, sold the house, and took most of the proceeds leaving her high and dry. Margie came to our bible study not knowing anyone and originally was there only because the aides wheeled her down to our room every week. It was clear she was in a “captivity” of her own. This all changed when, during the christmas season, Margie came out and asked at the end of one of our studies a question: “You know I was visited by this social worker who was the nicest woman and she was a muslim who covered her head. In leaving, she turned to me, gave me a hug, and said: ‘Merry Christmas!’ I didn’t know what to say back to her....what can I say?” Well, I said, Muslims have a lot of holidays around the

same time as Christians do. "Oh?" Margie said. "Could we learn about them?" The group eagerly supported Margie in this quest. So for the next month, here I was (during the Christmas season) leading bible study with a group where the average age was around 85 studying Muslim holidays and traditions. It was incredible! Margie opened up about her own struggles with faith and became well acquainted with another woman who had her over to her apartment for lunch every week. At the end of my internship, one of the hardest groups to leave was this bible study. On the last day, Margie came up and gave me a big hug: "thank you for helping me bring some church back into my life again," she said.

- "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places."

- Apocalyptic literature and images for many of us is very scary. Filled with wild beasts and fire, judgement and torment, much of our knowledge around this type of writing is based on the popular *Left Behind* series. "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs." Sounds dreary and scary right? Of course, let's not forget those "apocalypse experts" who come around every once in a while and say: "I've got it! I have figured it out! The bible code is broken and the end of the world will come at _____ date!" In reality, talk to most biblical scholars, and they will tell you this ancient style of literature was not meant to give a "secret code" or "literal date" when the end of the world will come. Infact, Christ says time and time again in other places of scripture: the end of the world is not really even in our purview or power. That's God's business. Not ours to know. So what is the purpose of ancient apocalyptic literature? Most of the time it was intended, actually, to give hope.

- Remember living as a Jew in the ancient world of the Roman Empire was not exactly a cake-walk. This was a population under intense occupation. They were, as an occupied group, taxed into poverty. Many of them were forced into worshiping and giving oaths to Cesar. Anyone who spoke out of line would be swiftly murdered. Not to mention disease, natural disasters, and hunger that constantly inhabited this time and place and you now begin to see a people that were in need of a God who would change things up. Later in chapter 13, Jesus ends what is known as his "little apocalypse sermon" with this: "Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." What is the hope which comes out of suffering that this text gives? The blurring of boundaries. For these end times signify not a specific event, but a falling of lines between God and creation. The boundaries that were once separating us from God now have fallen. God's presence will fill the world in radical new ways. This is the hope of ancient Judaism and, I strongly believe, our hope today who also live in tumultuous times.

-You know we have all heard of the prepared “apocalypse warners” right? Those who are living in the bunkers, reading their bibles literally, and warning of God’s wrath at every turn. But here’s the thing, the word *apocalypse* (*apo-’ kaluptein* in greek) where “apo” means “remove” and “kaluptein” means “cover” or “veil”. So all apocalypse really means is to “uncover”. The “end times” really got added later by pop culture. So, with this in mind, apocalypse really isn’t an event, but a continual revelation and “uncovering” of God’s love and presence. Maybe, where some are seeing themselves as the “apocalypse warners”, what if our church ironically saw itself as “apocalypse bringers”? Our mission, in the name of Christ, is to help people “uncover” more and more areas of divine presence, especially for those who don’t where to turn. What if we thought of ourselves as taking down boundaries and helping others see a God whose presence is already closely woven into our world?

-Here is what also is interesting about Ray Oldenburg’s Third Space theory: he warns that Third Spaces are rapidly disappearing. Due to things like technology, desire for more choice at all costs, the automobile, and suburban land use planning, deep Third Space gathering places are quickly disappearing (we can point to the old Disbrow’s market in Milltown as a prime local example)

-Thus, as as a church and one of the remaining 3rd Spaces left here in this area, is this scripture today calling us into both reclaiming vital 3rd Space for our community as well as bring “apocalypse” (or uncovering God) for others? Maybe the apocalypse is not fire and fury like most think, but instead begins with us. Maybe apocalypse happens everyday from tying prayer quilts to visiting someone in the hospital.

-”The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.” May it be so and may this apocalypse (or uncovering) begin with us. Amen.