

FIRST LESSON: Daniel 12:1-3  
SECOND LESSON: Mark 13:1-8  
November 17, 2024

***“Don’t Be Tricked”***  
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

Although only related to me by marriage I’m fond of quoting the curmudgeonly Mark Twain. Twain said, “When the end of the world comes, I want to be in Kentucky. They’re always 20 years behind everything.”

Our New Testament reading today has a name. It is referred to as “The Little Apocalypse,” because it is about the end of the world. It begins innocently enough with the disciples admiring the Temple. These were country people, and the Temple very impressive. Technically it wasn’t even finished being built at the time of Jesus. Herod began construction in 20 BCE and finishing touches were still being added at the time of Jesus. The stones were enormous. The remaining stones in the Wailing Wall are 44 ½ feet long and 11 feet high and weigh 570 tons each. This was an astonishing building, fifteen stories high by our reckoning. The white marble was adorned with gold on the outside so the building glowed. Inside was gold, silver, crimson and purple and polished cedar wood. There were huge columns. The Temple looked like it would last forever.

And yet the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 by fire. Roman soldiers built a giant bonfire around the Temple and the intense heat caused the moisture in the limestone to expand, which in turn made the stones explode. The Temple was reduced to rubble. That which looked invincible was gone.

Jesus knew that this would happen, and he urged his followers not to put their trust in material things. They wanted to know when these things would happen, connecting the destruction of the Temple with the Second Coming and the end of the world. But things are never that simple, and apocalyptic writing is always as ambiguous as it is terrifying. In the apocalyptic Book of Daniel, Daniel saw and heard the answer to the question of when will the final judgement come as, “It will be for a time, times and half a time,” to which he pretty much responded, “What?” But God said, “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.”

Our scripture passages this morning are about the end times, easily my least favorite subject. But even though I don’t personally like it, it is in scripture and therefore must be considered. We all want to pretend the world will last forever. It won’t. We are also all very good at pretending that we will

live forever. We won't. But every generation has managed to produce its doomsday prophets. And every generation has people who point to contemporary catastrophes and identify them as the fulfillment of biblical prophecies. Currently there are a particularly dangerous group of Christian nationalist pastors calling themselves the New Apostolic Reformation. They are from independent mega churches and claim that Donald Trump is ordained by God to bring their version of Christianity to rule American life. Because these men and women do not belong to any denomination or institution there is no one who can evaluate their words or hold them to account. Mainstream Christians from all denominations are beginning to speak out, trying to counteract this false narrative. History is littered with examples of such alleged prophets trying to create their own version of heaven on earth by force and all have ended in disaster. The kingdom of God comes by grace, not coercion.

Jesus did teach that the world would some day end, but he also warned us not to be tricked. He said that many would claim divine authority, and that they would be lying. "Watch out that no one deceives you," said Jesus. "Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he.'" Some false prophets claim to be the Messiah, but not all. Equally dangerous are the ones who allege insider knowledge. And there is no answer to someone who says, "God told me. . ." other than "No God didn't." The Seventh Day Adventists were started by a false prophet named William Miller who determined that October 22, 1844 was Judgment Day and the end of the world. Needless to say, it didn't happen. The Jehovah's Witnesses also originated as an end times cult. They taught that Jesus was to return in 1914 and when he didn't, they claimed he secretly did. Closer to our time Howard Camping claimed that Judgment Day was May 21, 2011 and billboards went up all over announcing it. We're still here. Howard Camping has passed away, and I can't help wondering what his explanation to God was.

Although none of us want to admit this, human nature is gullible. We believe things with no evidence whatsoever, based on emotion. It's why men like Hitler gained power. People get swept up in mass movements. Fear, prejudice and greed are powerful weapons in the hands of leaders who know how to use them. But scripture tells us to THINK. Scripture tells us to discern truth. And scripture tells us very clearly that when Jesus does return it will not be possible to mistake him for someone else. The Second Coming will not be a matter of opinion. According to the Gospel of Matthew there will be no ambiguity whatsoever. Jesus said, "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." (Matthew 24:26-27) Whether it is lack of biblical knowledge or emotional need, there are always some who fall into cult like thinking. We must not join their ranks.

Jesus said, "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains." These birth pangs have been in evidence since the beginning of time. They form the

background of our lives. We get obsessed in America with our own tragedies, but there is a whole world of suffering around us. Human sin and natural disaster can combine to form circumstances we might justifiably consider a harbinger of the end, and yet they are just labor pains.

Yes, things are tough right now. Is the world about to end? I really don't think so. A lot of us are afraid. People in our nation and around the world are very tense and politically divided. The entire world is struggling with the issue of climate change and trying to address the problem without massive economic fallout. We appear to argue about everything right now, and things that shouldn't be divisive at all have become divisive. But we have been here before, and we survived. Jesus warned us that bad things will happen. We don't need to look for secret meanings behind every world event. And most importantly, we should not give up on being the body of Christ in a world in need. The role of Christians when life has been at its most dire is essential. Christians hid Jews from the Nazis. We are also called to offer shelter and safety to those in need. Christians resisted the takeover of their churches in Germany when they were made over in the image of the Third Reich. When Christian Nationalism comes knocking at our doors, we must do the same. Christians are called to resist evil, and to love what is good. Each tragedy, each hardship, each stressful period of time provides an opportunity for God's grace. The battle against injustice will go on till the end regardless of who wins elections. The apostle Paul tells us "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6: 9)

They will know we are Christians by our love. Apocalyptic end of the world passages serve the same function a rumble strip on the highway does. They wake us up. They tell us to pay attention. They tell us to live as if we will be discussing what we did **today** with God **tomorrow**. They alert us to pay attention to our priorities, and to not be tricked by what is taking place around us. They are there not to instill terror and chronic anxiety into our lives but to remind us of our priorities. God does not want us to live in fear, but in joyful and strong faith. Amen

Daniel 12:1-3

1 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.<sup>2</sup> Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. <sup>3</sup> Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Mark 13:1-8

1 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

<sup>2</sup> “Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

<sup>3</sup> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup> “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

<sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. <sup>7</sup> When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.