

Mark 13:1-8 The Apocalypse

Good Morning...today on this beautiful Fall day I am going to talk to you about the apocalypse...be careful it may be our last day on earth together!

The year is 2024, we are in the midst of global warming, inflation, and coming off of a divisive election the doomsayers are going strong...a band called REM once published one of my favorite songs which claims it's the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine! This one line captures what I feel should be the Christian anthem with regard to "any" apocalypse...

To actually have eyes to see and ears to hear...to go beyond the illusions of this world and our very temporary time here.

Mark 13 is not an easy chapter – Sometimes it's called the "little apocalypse" because it is full doom and gloom! Revelation, The last book of the bible is also called the Apocalypse (that's the big apocalypse)...and at the beginning of Advent we will have Luke's apocalypse! All these Apaocolypses...Fun!

But in Greek the word "apocalypse" does not mean the end of days or doom it actually means "lifting of the veil" or revelation.

Jesus used the language of the Old Testament prophets in describing future trials, not only for future Disciples, but for His followers then. You see Jesus today foreshadowing his last week on earth and the challenges that His apostles own would soon be facing in just one short week.

As Jesus and his disciples leave the temple for what would be the last time, an unnamed disciple, representing everyone of us, comments on the splendor of the temple complex. Jesus uses this as a "teaching moment".

Now The Roman historian Tacitus described the temple complex as magnificent, a mountain of marble adorned with gold, a temple of immense wealth. Herod the Great built it to impress the wealthiest and most powerful rulers of his day...and he succeeded...and this disciple was just commenting on its amazing beauty and size! At its time the Temple to Yahweh was the largest temple built to any god on earth!

And Jesus' response was quite unexpected and shocking. First off Herod's temple was so much more massive and impressive than even King Solomon's temple...it was the pinnacle of human accomplishment...and even more importantly for any Jew (including Jesus) this was God's own house. The physical point where God and His people met. I mean why would God want to destroy his own home? This doesn't make too much sense to His disciples...why would it?

Symbolically one could say that the temple was now barren of true worship (like a lot of churches today) and like the religious leaders who served themselves in it...and it would all be destroyed...a bleak reminder to His followers to look beyond earthly appearances. In fact, Jesus was also foreshadowing the destruction of His own temple...His body in physical form as well; for he would soon be killed in just a few days.

Here in Jerusalem, during the week of His passion...nearing the cross, Jesus continues to help His disciples look beyond man's pride and accomplishments... to trusting instead in God's vision for the world not ours.

Now what if today were the end of the world?

Today's gospel seems to be telling us how to live in the midst of the unknown. The only two things one can count on as constants are change and God!

In our minds...Towering buildings are not supposed to crumble to the ground. Oceans are not supposed to cross boundaries and flood miles inland. The ground is not supposed to shake and collapse. The sky is not supposed to blow down buildings. Yet we are all too familiar with the collapse of the Twin Towers. We've seen a Tsunami flood a nation, experienced earthquakes, or watched as millions were devastated from Hurricane Katrina or right here in NJ during Super Storm Sandy. And then we all experienced a global pandemic!

Those who care for the victims during such events all express a profound sense of loss. See not only have they lost loved ones and property but at a deeper level they have lost their innocence. They now know that some things they once believed certain are no longer true!

They have lost a foundational notion that they built their lives around. They lose their security and belief in trusting the world and the ways of man. No longer can anyone go out and take for granite that our stable world is in fact stable at all.

As Jesus and His disciples are leaving the temple. Jesus startles them with His prediction that all these stones that form this great man made temple will all be destroyed ...makes no sense yet we know that's exactly what happened 70years later by the Romans.

The disciples had to have felt very secure in being with Jesus – I mean who wouldn't be? They were hooked up with the Messiah... what could go possibly wrong? Their Rabbi was God, they HAD to be on the winning team! Right?!

Then Jesus makes these predictions. They had no idea that in only a few days their foundation in Jesus would also be gone, and their once stable world would quickly turned into chaos and fear.

They would lose their innocence. But they would also begin to “see” the world as it truly is, and they would come to see God the way God truly is...the veil would indeed be lifted... all would be revealed. AN APOCALYPSE!

Every generation has heard the voice of those who claim to have insider information in predicting the end times. Last century it was the Y2K millennium doomsayers, then it was the end of the Mayan Calendar in Dec of 2012. It's always someone predicting the next apocalypse!

Why get caught up in predictions anyway...Jesus told us no one would know the time or place...all we have is today...to witness the gospel today...wherever we may be! To reveal God to one another through our lives as Disciples in a world that's always ever-changing.

So how do we survive the devastating news of our own small apocalypses? A cancer diagnoses or other life-threatening illnesses? How do we survive the loss of our innocence when nothing is certain or stable? How do we live with the background noise claiming the end is at hand?

See our focus must never be on the world and its signs, but rather on the thing behind it all – the one who enables us to look after one another with compassion... the one who enables us to look beyond such devastation...the one thing that is always constant.

Things at times may seem like they are falling apart. It may seem that chaos has been let loose on the world. Nevertheless, the center holds and much to our amazement – we discover that our spirits are still intact. For as the world changes all around us the only thing that remains constant for us is the stability of God at our center...and knowing that this all is leading somewhere.

It's the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine!

To reiterate...for the disciples this was their apocalypse! It was the end of the world as they knew it...They had no idea what Jesus was foretelling...They followed a rabbi of power and wisdom, their Messiah, they had no doubt they had had it all. They were on top of the world...until they weren't!

In just one week, one week...they would lose everything! Their stable world wasn't very stable! Their teacher and friend would give up His life... and the symbol and center of their Jewish faith would also later be destroyed...by all earthly appearances they would be left with NOTHING.

Little did they know that this apocalypse would be the birth pangs that would lead to the birth of Christianity and a Church where Jesus was no longer tied to the physical realm through body or buildings, but rather He would be present in the world to us all through Spirit!

So don't cling to your buildings and organizations and leaders so tightly...or you may just miss out on something new being birthed into the world right in front of you!

Jesus ushered in a new covenant whereby we would now be connected to God at our center...in our hearts...Where nothing in this world could touch or destroy our eternal spirits. Jesus would tear the curtain apart and lift the veil so that we may all glimpse the eternal being born into the world in Spirit!

Think on the person who has had everything going for them only to be devastated by cancer or some event that blindsides them and destroys the world as they knew it.

Where do you stand when the ground below you seems to open up and swallow you whole...when everything you hold dear is simply gone. Our brief time on this planet is but a parenthesis in eternity, a flicker of a match before it goes out! What if today was the end of your world?

See we must look beyond appearances and what our five senses tell us is real... and now we place our trust in something greater than our self...we call it God.

We all have to face our own end-times and the end-times of those we love and care for? Isn't our apocalypse pretty much guaranteed? There's no escaping it!

As C.S. Lewis said, once the author walks onto the stage, the play is over. What difference does it make whether the end of all things happens in my lifetime or if I go to be with God upon the occasion of my own personal demise?

Either way this world ends for us – same ending. What matters then is to be awake and aware...To have eyes to see and to have ears to hear...where God makes everything new in the constant change that is forever going on all around us... all the time.

Just a little perspective... here are some revelations (apocalypses) about our own physical world...a glimpse behind the curtain of that which we call stable.

Our physical world is actually a revolving door - In our world approximately 2 people die every second of every day, and conversely there are 4 births taking place at the same time.

Standing on solid ground means that you are spinning at over 1000 miles per hour, taking 24 hours to make one rotation, while also revolving around our sun at 67,000 miles per hour, taking one year to make that trip, and also revolving around the Milky Way at 550,000 miles per hour, taking 225 million years to make one rotation around the galaxy all while hurling through the universe at God knows what speed. And that's what we call standing still...standing on solid ground.

Ok so what's solid...well everything in our world is made up of atoms...if the nucleus of an atom was the size of my fist the first electron in the field would be over one mile away... our entire world then, and all that is in it is over 99% empty space, there's nothing solid about it at all!

And on a more personal level every cell in your body dies about every seven years and new cells replace them... so in fact you are physically a different person every seven years.

See this idea that things are constant, stable and solid is just the illusion of us and our limited senses. Jesus was attempting to reveal the Creator's will beyond the earthly things that we perceive and cling to so tightly to...

... for us, we trust in God...the one who created it all...we don't fly off into space...and we don't lose our memories every seven years...Our creator's design goes way beyond how we may look at the world from our limited human perspectives.

As Jesus says... It's about being awake... being aware of a constantly changing world and trusting in our creator to hold it all together...

Because for us humans, our world is in fact always ending...the apocalypse is always here. WE are guaranteed to witness the end of the world as we know it with the destruction of our own bodies... no matter how beautiful or how strong they're built...our bodies will all fail us in the end...but something new will always be born..another apocalypse, a lifting of the veil, revealing to us a greater understanding beyond our current senses...what truly is...the eternal... our spirits reborn and made new!

It's the end of the world as we know it...do you feel fine... knowing that the one thing that is stable and beyond the reach of all this constant change is God?

So may we trust in God's vision for us and for the world...and may we come to believe that at the end of all things...we will experience a revelation and be made new through our Savior Jesus Christ.

For it's the end of the world as we know it...and I promise we're all gonna be fine!

Your faithful servant,

carmen