

Sermon for November 30, 2014
Mark 13:24

Our Gospel reading today begs us to ask the question—what would you do if the world were going to end tomorrow? Jesus seems to be warning his disciples about the end of time and the picture he paints rivals many of the science fiction movies I've seen. He talks about the sun and the moon becoming dark, the stars falling from the skies and the heavens being shaken.

And that's the problem; we don't talk like that except in fictional stories and movies. In Jesus' time and during the times of the plagues in the Middle Ages they were expecting him to return at any moment, but do any of us really think that Jesus will be coming back in our life time?

There are some people who do and to be honest we dismiss them because their predictions haven't come true. The world was supposed to end on Dec 12th 2012 when the Mayan calendar ended. Harold Camping had it all figured out that the world would end with Jesus' return on May 21, 2010 and when that didn't happen he figured it would be on Oct 21st of 2010. Well, Jesus hasn't come back and now Harold Camping is dead. Before him it was the Y2K scare of Jan 1, 2000 and a generation before that it was Hal Lindsey. Many have predicted the end of the world as we know it, but it hasn't happened yet and that makes it easy to dismiss it happening in our lifetime.

And yet they're right—oh not about the timing, but about the fact that Scripture promises that Christ will return, that God will bring everything to a good end—the end of suffering, the end of death—God will wipe away every tear and we will see God clearly; face to face not as through a mirror dimly.

But thinking like that forces us to see that what we tend to think of as being permanent really is much more fragile and vulnerable than we care to admit. But deep down we know it's true. Whether it's the dark, cold lifeless land around us this time of year; or the death of a dear friend or loved one; or when it takes us longer to overcome our illnesses—we know that this world is not permanent and our denial is stripped away.

So what would we do if the world was ending tomorrow? Would we reach out to a loved one and reconcile our differences? Would we finish the projects we started years ago? Would we tell those we love that we love them one last time?

When we contemplate this question it helps us to see what our priorities are and just what we value in life especially as we get ready to enter this insanely busy season that leads us to Christmas. Why? Because it's so easy to get caught up in what we're supposed to be doing and feeling that we can easily lose ourselves and what Christmas truly means.

Society pressures us to have the perfect Christmas and so we plan and prepare, we shop and we party, we decorate, we cook and we send cards doing all of those we things we both love and dread. That's why this hour is so important. It gives us some Advent space, to be still, to experience just a little bit of quiet and to be reminded that we are God's beloved children.

Which brings us back to today's passage. Mark tells us that no one knows the day or the hour and so we have to keep watch. Mark compares our situation to servants who don't know when their master will return, but they are expected to

be prepared for it. We're called to constant vigilance to be on the look out for our Lord—whether it be at the end of time or in the face of our neighbor in need.

But there's more going on here than just being watchful. Jesus says that we do not know when the master will return, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn. To understand these words better it's good to know that this parable takes place right before the story of the passion.

Notice how Mark describes the scenes leading up to the crucifixion. When it was evening he came with the twelve for the Last Supper. And then at Gethsemane Jesus finds the disciples sleeping for their eyes were heavy because it was the middle of the night. At Jesus' trial Peter denies Jesus and at that moment the cock crowed for the second time. And then as soon as it was morning the elders, chief priests and scribes handed Jesus over to Pilate.

Another way to read this is to hear Jesus declare that his return—when the heavens shake and the sun is darkened—is the exact moment when Jesus is nailed to the cross and we see God's love poured out for us and all of creation. When and however the world shall end, it is prefigured and realized in the form of a man who goes to the cross out of love for us and all of creation for it was at this moment that one age ended and another began.

Martin Luther was once asked what he would do if the world were to end tomorrow and he is reported to have said that he would go out and plant a tree. We can also be that confident and sure of God's love for us and promises about the future. We can also invest in the everyday and ordinary, in the people and

causes all around us for we have God's promise in the cross and resurrection of Christ that in time God will draw all of creation to an end—a good end.

So don't wait to do what you would do if the world were to end. Love the ones you want to love; finish the projects you've started; reconcile with the ones with whom you're estranged; start new and wonderful endeavors because Christ has come; Christ is coming and Christ will come again out of love. And it's us—God's beloved children for whom Christ died and now lives—for whom Christ is coming!

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