

## It's the End of the World as We Know It (and I feel fine)

Twenty Sixth Sunday after Pentecost; November 18, 2018

Sometimes, sometimes it really feels like we are entering the apocalypse. I happen to have arrived in Manhattan last week on a Friday afternoon, where it was raining, loud, glaring with neon, packed with people with their heads down mumbling in a thousand languages, and it truly felt that I was in the movie *Bladerunner*. Bleak. Isolating. Ominous. The only thing missing was the flying cars. In so many totally frightening ways it felt like a microcosm of how the world has been making me feel lately.

Remember how, when we have had the Passover Seder here, there's a part where you put a drop of wine on the plate for each of the ten plagues as you recite them out loud? Blood, frogs, locusts and by the time you get to the slaying of the first born there is a blood-red pool of wine at your place. I feel as if we could update the ten plagues to include mass shootings, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, our immigration policies and the lack of civility in political debates. We would look up and find ourselves awash.

I don't mean to go all full-bore end-times here, but geez. We don't seem to be doing a very good job and, if we turn to scripture for comfort this week, it appears we are not going to find it. "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines." All the stones will be thrown down.

I read today's lectionary and was instantly depressed, turning to fine literature for comfort, like Joustra and Wilkinson's book, *How to Survive the Apocalypse*. I toyed with the idea of binge-watching *The Walking Dead*. Of re-reading Ayn Rand. Of hiding under the bed.

But here's where I was wrong, where any of us who read Mark's "little apocalypses" and go into a tailspin can draw comfort. Our English teachers were right- it's all about vocabulary. Dystopia versus apocalypse. Dystopia: Everything is bad. A not-good place, the opposite of a utopian, ideal society. The reading today? Apocalypse: According to Robert Joustra, "The Greek word *apokalypsis* means not only destruction, not only the disruption of reality but the dismantling of perceived realities- an ending of endings, a shocking tremor of revelation that remade creation in its wake. It renews as it destroys."

it renews as it destroys. It reveals something new. Throughout the literature of all civilizations, we look for the balance of Yin and Yang, Eden and Armageddon, Asgard and Ragnarok. Andy Crouch in *Christianity Today* says we need the destruction stories as much as the creation not because we want things to collapse but that we need to see them set right. And for that we wait. But in that waiting, we can't be passive.

Dennis Cook is a Presbyterian minister in Canada and when he reflected on this reading from Mark, what drew his attention was the fact that when the disciples asked to be told when these events would occur Jesus didn't give them a date. Instead he warned them to watch out and stay alert. He wrote "But the reason Jesus told the disciples these things wasn't so they could pinpoint a date. It wasn't to give

them a head start so they could get their affairs in order. It wasn't to let them gloat when things happened and they could say "I told you so." The point Jesus was making was to watch out- be prepared, persevere in the midst of the struggles to come. "

He continued 'In effect Jesus was telling the disciples that they would have to live on the edge. Danger would lend an edginess to their lives. Their faith would have to persevere in the times when it would be a lot easier to give up and give in to the pressures that opposed God. After the resurrection and after the Church was up and running, many in the first generation Church did actually believe that Christ would return before they died. They lived in expectation. They lived with energy and enthusiasm because they fully anticipated they would live to see the Second Coming. I doubt that their adrenaline and heart rate stayed locked in a high-octane mode. But they lived on the edge. They lived *with* an edge. They lived with an attitude that remained focused on the Lord, day in and day out...A comfortable faith in a comfortable Church leading to a comfortable life trying to make sure that our part of the world remains comfortable isn't what Jesus had in mind for 1st century Christians or 21st century Christians."

So we are called out, called to imagine what this apocalypse, this transformation will look like. And how we will live with energy and enthusiasm. How we will persevere in times when it seems easier to give up.

Lutheran Pastor Mary Hinkle Shore agrees that "The world is undeniably a mess. As people of faith we do not deny the strength of evil and our own warring madness, but neither do we take refuge in violence, fear or despair. As people of faith, we lean into that really messed up world the way God leaned into it by becoming human and the way Jesus leaned into it by fraternizing with sick and hurting people and calling out corrupt and powerful people." "In the face of disaster," she says, "the temptation is to hide, or lash out or even just settle for taking care of our own. Our faith calls us to the opposite, leaning in, living for others and looking in steadfast hope for an ending worthy to be called resurrection." Living for others.

"This is but the beginnings of the birthpangs." Ah. The Eden to our apocalypse. The Asgard to our Ragnarok. The creation of a world based in peace, a world of Shalom. We look forward to the end of the world we know. The end of a violent world birthing a peaceful one. The end of an impoverished world, birthing a just one. The end of a hateful world, birthing a world pulsing with love, as David Henson describes it.

I think Jesus reminds us not to focus so much on what we don't know, but to watch for what comes next. I think Jesus wants us on the edge of our seats. But I also think he wants us to use that energy to help create that new world that will rise up from the toppled stones. I think he wants us to not be complacent. I think he does want us to be the midwives that help bring about that new world.

The world feels like it's changing around us. Norms are breaking down, cherished values seem to have lost their value, we feel threatened and confused. Believe me, I know. Our short-comings are being revealed. Our opportunity, as we wait with anticipation for the new world to be revealed to us, is to work as co-creators of that peace. To feel relief at the destruction of an old world order that rewarded

systemic racism, hard borders and a me-first philosophy and to be challenged to help create God's new kingdom of equality, compassion and stewardship of the earth.

We can reset our priorities to be a people of peace, to bring a new world into place where no one is in need, no one lives in fear.

Our stories keep changing. We let go of what we thought we knew to allow room for what we learn. Once we knew the world was flat. Once we knew we were the center of the universe. Imagine what we'll know tomorrow if we're willing to labor, to help bring a new creation into life.

Amen.