

It's the End of the World As We Know It and I Feel Fine
Mark 13:1-8, 24-37

It feels a bit like the end of the world doesn't it. As I walked down College Avenue this week I saw this even posted on a business door.

How could things fall apart so quickly? How could our complicated world and society shut down seemingly overnight?

Apocalypse in Greek – means “*a revealing or disclosure of what actually is*” as opposed to a doomsday battle with which it's often associated. Apocalypse is the original title in Greek of the last book in the Bible that we can Revelation, which is still called Apocalypse in many other languages such as French and Spanish.

Mark 13 known as the Apocalypse of Mark. Because in it Jesus discloses what actually is, pulling back the curtain on reality.

After entering Jerusalem (Mark 11) and then confronting the powers that be (the pharisees, sadducees, scribes, and Herodians etc) Jesus judges the Temple Institution as wrongly oriented, corrupt and as effective as growing fruit as a dead fig tree.

This was the epicenter of Jewish life and the Jewish nation – the place where heaven and earth met. The space in which God's presence dwelled and could be encountered through prayer and sacrifice. It was the place on earth where they believed God could be found, spoken with, heard from. Here Jesus not only condemns it but says it will be destroyed. It's destruction would mean the absence of God in the world. If there is no Temple where would one seek God?

In his words Jesus recycles the cataclysmic poetry of the prophets who talks of the Day of the Lord as a time of divine transformation when the world as we know it is shaken and remade. It's the day of judgement of the wicked, the enemies of Israel, and salvation for Israel through a climactic manifestation of the glory of God. Joel, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Amos talk of this turning of the world with the cryptic metaphor of “in those days...” The language is intended to describe something that is beyond the limits of words: earthquakes, the sun being eclipsed, the stars falling from the heavens. But it's prophetic poetry, meant to be read more poetically than literally, more metaphorical than scientific. It's the effective way to talk about the end of the world as we know it as what truly is, what has actually always been, is revealed.

It's the death of Jesus on the cross that is the Day of the Lord...the end of the world... when God promises to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Jeremiah 31:31-33

Jesus comes to upending the expectations of the world...the son of man comes to serve and not be served, to give and to give his life as a ransom for many. Being a disciple of Jesus is living into that ethos. Grows out of that identity. Here in this last week of Lent.. we see the revealing of that truth...in the places where we least expect to see God, is where God is most fully revealed.... We know how God is less in the prayers and offerings amidst the incense and gold of the Temple. God is most fully revealed in universe-changing service of our neighbor, small and big acts of self-giving love, in Jesus facing betrayal by his friends, abandonment by his followers, accusations based on fake news, unjust incarceration, and ultimately public execution on a cross by the power afraid of the hope he represents. God in Christ has walked those roads, lived such abandonment, brokenness, isolation, injustice and depression. When we feel like it's the end of the world, we can trust our future to the revealing that God too has faced and lived the end of the world. And so we can live in faith, even radical hope in this time of COVID-19 that can feel like an apocalypse, when the world feels like it's ending...not because we're naïve, or foolish, or turn a blind eye to reality...but because we seek to see the world, each other and ourselves through the eyes of God – a different vision rooted in trust, grace, love and hope.

It is the end of the world. Much of what we've known, or thought to be true isn't ripping apart like the curtain in the Temple, and falling down like a building in an earthquake. Our institutions and economy are more fragile than we thought. Our economy is less about individual freedom than about mutual interdependence. Maybe we've been taking for granted our relationships and the chance to be together. We're seeing the injustice of the ways that we treat the elderly that we at times move to "homes" to make our lives easier, and the poor who live on our streets and along the margins that we look away from in our daily grind.

Jesus tells the disciples here to stay awake, and alert, to have their eyes open watching for God's movement...like the virgins in the parable who went out to meet the bridegroom with their lamps..like the like the disciples who in that least evening with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane couldn't stay awake as he asked them to pray with him, to keep him company....like the moment near midnight when Judas and the troops came to arrest Jesus,...like the devastating betrayal of Peter who denied knowing Jesus as cockcrow the next day, and like in the morning as Jesus was brought before Pilate for judgment and the crowds rather than offering him grace shouted "crucify him! Crucify him!"

It does feel like the end of the world in some ways. But these apocalyptic times are not the apocalypse described by Mark – the death of Jesus on the cross – when the true nature of the world and God was revealed. We can find strength, hope and courage by rooting ourselves in the knowledge that Jesus has crossed the end of the world. Rooting ourselves in his way of life we can look at the apocalypse around us and respond from that center....loving others, serving rather than being served, overcoming fear in the knowledge that we are loved and claimed by a God who has known all the deep dark valleys of despair in life.... that we are not alone.