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St. Luke's Episcopal Church ~ Anchorage, Kentucky
25th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 28
Mark 13:1-8

Apocalyptic literature, more often than not, seems to catch the interest of most people. There is deep intrigue regarding the conceptualization of the end days. In fact many authors and Hollywood producers have honed in on this phenomena by producing box office hits and best-selling books, such as 'The Day after tomorrow', and the well-known, dramatic book series "Left Behind". Moreover, there are even YouTube videos that lend instruction on how to survive the 'apocalypse.'

Chapter 13 of the Gospel of Mark has frequently been referred to as the little apocalypse, as texts such as "wars or rumors of wars", or earthquakes and famines, have promulgated concern throughout the history of the Christian church. I did some research to learn more about the history of the predictions for apocalyptic events, and what I discovered was quite surprising! (According Wikipedia), there have been an estimated 163 documented predictions of apocalyptic events beginning from the first century up until the present time, nine predictions within the next 60 years, and still a handful beyond that. I don't know about you, but I find this data to be overwhelming and exhausting.

However, not all of these predictions were made by fanatics, but by intelligent, faith filled individuals. For example, second and third century Church Fathers, Hippolytus of Rome and Saint Irenaeus –Bishop of Lugdunum (loogdoonum) in Gaul predicated that Jesus would return in the year 500. Sixteenth century Martin Luther predicted that the end of the world would occur no later than 1600. And nineteenth century Anglican and founder of Methodism, John Wesley wrote that Revelation 12:14 referred to the years 1058-1836 as "when Christ should come."

In today's gospel passage, Jesus warns the disciples that things are not how they appear to be when it comes to the coming of the kingdom of God. The disciples were overwhelmed by the grandeur and majesty of the newly renovated Temple, and who wouldn't be intrigued with such an elaborate and enormous architectural structure. Herod had quite the reputation of arranging the construction of big, bold and beautiful architectural structures. The Temple was said to have encompassed 1/6 of the city of Jerusalem, and was constructed of marble and adorned in gold. And yet, in its entire splendor, Jesus finds the Temple to be spiritually bankrupt, and he warns his disciples to guard against being distracted by the way things appear to be.

As followers of Christ, we are called to be aware of the continuous signs of God at work in the world, but we must be leery of becoming overly fixated upon them, as this can create misinterpretation, confusion, and fear. Our commitment to serve Christ in the world does not hinge determining when the end of the world will come, for this is fear-based, and can lead us astray. We are to trust and acknowledge that, yes, God is transforming the world, and that we play an important role in this transformation. As Disciples of Christ, we are to be messengers of hope in the world, and it is hope that sustains us through the changes and challenges of each day while reminding us to remain steadfast and strong in all circumstances.

When we become too fixated on the future we lose sight of the present. It's all too easy for us to mentally project ourselves into the next day, week, month or year, and when this happens, we become overwhelmed and depleted, as worry divides our energy. For some reason, it is a real challenge for us to simply live in the moment... in this moment, here...now... For it is when we live in the moment that we find the presence of the Holy Spirit...that still small voice that is so difficult to hear or discern in a world/society that is moving forward with warp speed. When we fail to live in the present, we tend to fall prey to worry, and worrying about our future.

Well known pastor and author Max Lucado writes “The more you worry, the more helpless you feel. God knew that anxiety could do this to you. That’s why he said don’t worry...come to me and rest...in other words trust me.” End quote. Matthews’s gospel echoes this, also as Jesus says “Do not worry” three different times. Jesus sees the bigger picture that encompasses more than we could begin to imagine.

We must remain faithful and be leery of getting caught up in the uncertainties of life. Shine your light in the world, and remain vigilant in your faith. Be kind to one another, and encourage one another with faith and courage. Be at peace. If God knows when a small sparrow falls to the ground, how much more precious are we to him?

Be at Peace

Be at peace
Do not fear the changes of life
Rather look to them with full hope as they arise
God, whose very own you are,
will deliver you from out of them. He has kept you hitherto,
And He will lead you safely through all things; and when you cannot stand it, God will
bury you in His arms.
Do not be afraid of what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting Father
Who cares for you today
will take care of you then and every day.
He will either shield you from suffering,
Or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it.
Be at peace
And put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.

~ St. Francis de Sales

