

Proper 28 B
Mark 13:1-8
Hebrews 10:11-25
November 18, 2018
St. George's Episcopal Church
Fr. Chris

Love Provoked

“Tell us, when this will be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?”

I don't know about you, but I hear plenty of people recently talking about the days of the Apocalypse. The news they hear on the 24-hour news cycle now makes people live in fear of the end times as described in our common shared Bible about the coming Apocalypse. Surely the end must be near, they posit, or more rightly, ask, seeking input and the opinions of others. What are people of faith to say in this context?

We hear of seemingly unending wars in far away places like the Middle East and Afghanistan. Peace seems elusive in these places where war and suffering and dying seem to be a way of life.

We hear of rumors of more conflicts heating up, countries building up their armor against one another, and while this may be good news for arms merchants, the rest of us wonder, as did the disciples, when is the end coming?

In the same 24-hour news cycle we witness horrible wildfires in California, floods and hurricanes in several parts of our country, and very early snowstorms that pile up more than 6 inches of snow and snarl traffic, with more predicted over the next several days. And we begin to wonder, what is going on? Are these the signs of the end time?

We hear of famines and we gather food here at church in our parking lot this morning to ease the hunger problem back home. Are these the signs of the end times?

What time is it? Indeed the author of Ecclesiastes [1:9] states, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” And when you think about the scope of modern History since Jesus walked

the paths of this earth, this observation is certainly true. There is nothing new under the sun, including those apocalyptic fears.

So, please tell us, What time is it?

I count the increasing number of birthdays I have celebrated. I hear the voice of my doctors describing my health concerns and what I must do. I read the flurry of notices I receive in the mail inviting me to buy life insurance, long-term health care insurance, and funeral plan insurance. How cheerful or should I say, “fearful” are these harbingers of my future! And I begin to wonder what the world around is telling me about what time it is in my life... Am I running out of time? Never mind decades and years, are these the last days of my life?

All of these questions and the news that we are brought, beg us to ask, What time is it really?

The clock is ticking, but we have a chance to change. We have a chance to change course in our personal lives, and we have a chance to have an impact on our community life together. To do nothing is to bury our head in the sand until nightfall comes and it is too late and sleep beckons us to drift off, hopefully not to judgment of our souls by the higher power of God, but more likely the waking disturbance of our conscience as we wrestle with opportunities missed and things left undone that ought to have been done.

Jesus observes, “...this is nothing but the beginnings of the birth pangs”

I hope that the birth pangs lead us to a new life, with more joy, peace, and less fear. I hope the birth pangs teach us to be lovers and that love is what this life is all about. Instead of wakeful nights wondering about opportunities missed in the school of love, let it be as the author of the letter to the Hebrews suggests: “with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” Our hearts and our conscience cleaned and cleared. That sounds like a good night’s sleep to me. No regrets at the end of the day. The important things, the priorities of life were accomplished in my life today!

Instead of the law, the commandments being written written out on a scroll or etched in a stone wall, or in a prayer book we pick up once a week or a Bible gathering dust on a bedside table, the scripture says, “I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds...and I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.” In other words, the law of love is now written in your heart to

be lived every day, and the temptation of acting in an unloving way has lost all its power and potential.

What time is it? It is high time to love. I time to trust God and not fear the end times. They will come no matter what we do. But we can be prepared for them by making love the priority of our lives. We can respond to rumors of war by being people who live peacefully and are advocates for peace and sanity, instead of hatred and unlove.

We can respond by being provocative. I love how the author of Hebrews put it: "...provoke one another to love."

"And let us consider how to provoke one another on toward love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as some are in the habit of doing, but provoking and encouraging one another to love—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Amen