

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, November 17, 2024 "How to live in these last days" based on Mark 13:1-8

Martin Luther was once asked what he would do if he knew that the world was coming to an end tomorrow. He said: "I would plant a tree today." In other words, Luther, trusting in God's gracious, unmerited mercy, would live life just as he had been living it. He would do something productive that day. When John Wesley was asked the same thing... he liked routine... he said that he would arise at 4:00 AM, preach at 5:00 visit the sick at 7:00, go to communion at 8:00...etc., until the questioner realized that that was exactly what Wesley had planned to do tomorrow anyway! Because we believe that Jesus has already secured a future for us with hope through the cross and resurrection, we can live in the promises of our faith and baptism in confidence and hope now.

This sort of reminds me of watching the Badger men play basketball this weekend against Arizona. They won 103-88. The teams shot a combined 87 free throws. That's a lot. The refs were calling it tight. In the press conference after, the players said in the huddles during the game, just control the controllables. You can't control what the refs call. Go on to the next play. Maybe that's a little what Luther was saying.

What would you do if you knew the world was coming to an end tomorrow? Would you live differently today? Would you Change anything?

In our Gospel today from Mark, it is the beginning of what is called the mini apocalypse that looks at the end times. Jesus is foretelling the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which also includes destruction of the religious political structure, and the sacrifice of animals for forgiveness. The Temple was begun by Herod the Great and was not yet unfinished. The stones, some of which can still be seen today on the Western Wall were 37.5 feet long and 18 feet wide and 12 feet thick. The disciples simply commented walking out how big the stones and buildings were. Jesus said, in your lifetime, not a stone will be left on stone.

Then in private, the disciples wanted to know... when will this be? Jesus did not answer them right away. But warned them to beware of false prophets and false Messiahs that will come in Jesus' name and try to lead them astray. He also said, when you hear of wars and rumors of wars. "Do not be alarmed." These things must take place, but the end is still to come. There will also be earthquakes and famine in various places. Then Jesus said, this is but is the beginning of the birth pangs. The pain of the current times will be followed by the joy of new birth. Something new is emerging. The kingdom Jesus came to bring is being fulfilled. We are in the already but not yet. Then later in verse 32 about when will this be? Jesus says about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Some people I talk to feel that we are in the end times now. With all the wars and natural disasters and false prophets out there, it is easy to go there. So, the question becomes for us "what now?" How do we live now? Do we fold up our tents and hunker down? Or do we engage the world like Jesus did. In a few short weeks we will celebrate Jesus' birth. He was born into a world dominated by the Roman Empire. He went about his business of healing people, feeding people, teaching people, and going to the cross on our behalf.

Our Hebrews text gives us clue as to how do live in these days.

It says, we have Jesus as our High Priest. Therefore, we should have confidence and boldness, and assurance to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus.

The old way is gone. We don't need to go through a high priest to enter the Holy of Holies through a curtain to offer an animal sacrifice for forgiveness for us. Hebrews says there is a new and living way through the curtain... that is Jesus' flesh and our baptism.

Recall Mark 15:37-38 from the cross, "Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom."

The curtain that closed off the Holy of Holies which represented God's presence with his people is torn apart. For Christians Jesus' death ripped the curtain open and gave unhindered access to God for all.

In the meantime, verse 10:24 "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Through our words and deeds, we are called to provoke others to good works and acts of love. Does your life attract or scare people to want to know Jesus? This text also says we should continue to gather for worship until the Day Jesus returns... which we are doing today.

May we live in confidence and boldness that thy kingdom come they will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May we trust that nothing in all creation, neither height nor depth, nor angels nor demons, nor principalities nor powers will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.