

“Come, Lord Jesus!”

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
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Old Testament lesson: Isaiah 64:1-5a

New Testament lesson: Mark 13:24-33

A father and his teenage son were having breakfast one morning. During their conversation, the boy challenged his father’s insistence that he do better in school, saying his grades didn’t matter. “... After all,” he said, “we will all be dead soon anyway.” The father replied, “What makes you so important, that after all these eons of time, and billions of people, you get to be one of the special ones to be here at The End of the World? I suppose you may be that special, but if I were you, I would develop a plan B.” To which his son simply grinned and said, “You’re weird, Dad.”¹

The world we live in today is weird – and not in a good way. There’s the breakdown of moral behavior and social decency, an insatiable desire for wealth and power, complete disregard for the plight of fellow human beings, mental health issues mixed with firearms leaving us all vulnerable, a spirit of hate fueling horrendous acts terrorism, and the degradation of our planet and its natural resources.

Could it be that we are so special as to be here at The End of the World? Lord have mercy; I hope not. But, just to be sure, let’s look at the signs. Scripture tells us, “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.” Well, the sun came up this morning. That’s reassuring. The moon and the stars were shining last night. That’s a blessing. And God is still large and in charge, thank the Lord.

Whenever you feel overwhelmed by local, national and world events, find some time in your busy schedule to stop and look up. Gaze at the sky – the grandeur of creation, the warmth of the sun, the light of the moon and the stars – and know that God is still large and in charge. On that day when the Lord does return to make all things right, take heart in knowing that all will be well with you.

That’s not to say that you won’t face struggle, loss and fear along the way. You will – we all do. But in the fullness of Christ, at the coming of the Lord, all will be redeemed. Still, I ask again, Could it be that we are so special as to be here at The End of the World? The beginning of the end? Probably not. After all, we’ve been here before – the rise of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust; the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the persecution of Christians; captivity in Egypt and our journey through the Wilderness, the near sacrifice of Isaac at the hand of his father Abraham; Noah and the Flood; Adam and Eve and the serpent. It’s natural to think that times of great struggle signal the end of the world, but it’s just not the case.

For instance, the Princeton Religion Research Center conducted a poll in 1990 just after the beginning of the Gulf War. At that time, 15% of Americans believed that Gulf hostilities signaled the beginning of the end.” And yet, Jesus says, “...About that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Only God knows the time of Christ’s return, when we *will* see the fullness of God’s glory.

In the meantime, amid the struggles of our day, we keep the faith. Like generations before us from the beginning of humanity, we keep the faith. We don't turn backs on God or give up on the church, because, for sure, there's no future in that.

It like the farmers who were fishing on the side of the road. They made a sign saying "The End is Near! Turn yourself around before it's too late!" and they showed the sign to each passing car. One driver that passed didn't appreciate the sign and shouted, "Leave us alone you religious nuts!" All of a sudden they heard a big splash, and one farmer turned to the other and said, "Maybe we should change the sign so it says: 'Bridge Out.'"

There are no signs for the end of the world that we need worry about. All we need to do is have faith in God's word. "Truly I tell you," says Jesus, "this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place."

That's a huge assurance. In that assurance, we have God's word that humanity will not be destroyed, but rather redeemed – redeemed even amid the greatest of earthly struggles. God's people will "see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory." Humanity will live to see that. We will see God in the flesh again, Jesus the Christ.

Moreover, says Jesus, at the coming of the Lord, God "will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." In other words, all God's people from every time and place will be gathered in fellowship with God. No longer will we be separated from our Creator, but rather reconciled – reconciled to God and one another, and to all creation.

So no, we are probably not facing the end of the world at this time, but rather, what we face today is yet another series of social, political, moral, and spiritual crises. Nothing that God can't handle. As for us, there is no doubt that people need to wake up to the damage we are causing. We need to stop acting like it's OK to objectify women; to marginalize people based on gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity; to abandon the poor and the homeless to a system stacked against them; to treat our planet like a garbage dump. We need to stop all that.

We need to pray for our families, our communities, our nation and our world. We need to be truer to who God created us to be. And we need to have faith in the assurance of God's word. We need to take a stand in commitment to God's work. We need to be instruments of God's redemption of the world and reconciliation of all people. That's our role- to treat this planet and other people decently- and to have faith in God to handle the rest. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Lord, we come to you in gratitude for your love, which is always present to us, even in times of struggle and grief.

We remember the times in our lives when your love enabled us to rise to our better selves.

We thank you for the gift of your son, who came that we might know what perfect love looks like.

We remember with regret the times when we have acted in anger rather than in love; we recall with remorse when our patience has been thin and our behavior childish.

Forgive us for the times we have loved things and used people, when we have failed to hold love as the priority in our lives.

Help us to let go of the guilt we carry because we have been less than loving. Let us breathe in new life, replacing old burdens with a new enthusiasm to begin again.

We pray all this in the certainty of your unending love for us, raising our eyes to heaven and our voices in the Lord's Prayer, as together we sing:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**