

November 14, 2021

**“Why Bother?”**  
**Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

*Hebrews 10: 15-18*

*And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,  
“This is the covenant that I will make with them  
after those days, says the Lord:  
I will put my laws in their hearts,  
and I will write them on their minds,” he also adds,  
“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.*

*Mark 13:1-8*

*As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”  
When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.*

**Sermon “Why Bother?”**

I remember sometime around 2007, our 10 year old son Andrew came to us shaking and crying. He told us that the world was ending and he was scared. I can't remember if this was the prediction about the planets aligning in a certain way that was going to cause a bunch of earthquakes or if it was the guy who said that 144,000 people had to join together and “resonate in harmony” or the world would end. Either way it was Andrew's first experience of thinking that the world could come to an end.

I took him in my arms and consoled him saying, “honey, I have lived through the end of the world at least a dozen times now.” Julie and I googled it for him and showed him how many times the world was predicted to end and the date came and went just like it was any other day. This seemed to calm him down quite a bit and he went about being a kid.

Jesus as portrayed by Mark tells us these predictions are going to happen over and over again and tells us not to be alarmed. But he also says there will be great war and famine and these are the birth pangs. He goes on later to tell us all kinds of stuff is going to happen but our job is to stay focused, don't be led astray by others and just keep telling the good news. We are loved and forgiven

In my hospital ministry, I hear this all the time, people who have been stuck in their bed watching rumors of war and dire news tell me as soon as I walk into the room. “Chaplain, I think we are in the end times, there are signs of it everywhere.” Some will speak of the natural disasters, the fires and earthquakes, some will speak of the virus as a sign, some will tell me it started when we let women marry women and men marry men.

At this point I usually quickly change the subject and try to gently steer the conversation back to them and ask them how they are coping with their diagnosis. Oftentimes when I do this, with compassion and tenderness they will begin to cry, to open up, and actually grieve what they are going through. Suddenly the end of the world which had them in a state of frenzy seems to recede in their mind as they let show what is really bothering them and start processing their very real emotions.

It is a psychological and historical fact that when times are hard, both as a nation or as an individual, our minds will try and protect us by distracting us with the non-sensical. I read one article where a psychologist pointed out that when we focus on the “end times” we can reduce all the real and present dangers down to one single, simple, and definable source, that we can do nothing about. “It’s the end of the world, just as Jesus said”. This is actually less stressful on the human mind than reality.

When Mark wrote his gospel, there were all kinds of bad things happening, the temple actually did get destroyed, Christians were being persecuted by Jewish people and by the Romans. They needed to think that all their suffering was just a means to a happier ending, where Jesus would return and all would be well with the world. Currently, in the US, 22 percent of adults believe that the world will come to an end in their lifetime. That tells us that there are a whole lot of people that feel out of control of their lives and the world around them. These rumors are often fueled by religious manipulators and a whole lot of apocalyptic scriptures.

Pat Robertson predicted it for both 1982 and 2007, Jerry Falwell predicted it would happen in 2000 as did many, the list goes on and all the way back to the foundations of our faith. The Abrahamic Religions which we are a part of have the most apocalyptic scriptures of all religions and cultures combined.

A survey of Americans showed that 94 percent of our citizens think that things have gotten much worse in their lifetimes, but in spite of the immediate problems of COVID, climate change and our political climate, humanity has improved immensely. The literacy of people, human rights for people, the infant mortality rate, the poverty rate, healthcare, the yearly income increases for people worldwide has drastically improved in the last decade and it is mind blowing how much those statistics have improved in the last 100 years.

Humanity is actually on the rise, but you will not hear of this from most political leaders, religious leaders, or from the media. You’ve heard me say it before, you can’t control people who aren’t afraid and you can’t sell news that is good. But that is exactly what we are to do, right, tell the good news?

One article I read talked about how throughout history, the threat of the end of the world has been used by politicians and religious leaders alike to divert us from the things that are actually going on, whether it's corruption, justification for starting a war, or just good old greed.

Our problems today all have solutions. Climate change has solutions, but not if we keep denying it and just saying the end of the world is inevitable because it says so in the bible. Covid has solutions, but not if we keep denying them and pretending there isn't a problem anymore. The end is near so why bother? Racism has solutions. Hunger, poverty, all of it, but not from here. Not from this place of denial, hatred, and division that is defining us as a people. We have to quit letting those who pretend to know what they are talking about divert us from what is really going on and be committed to solutions.

Having an "end times" notion may be less stressful but it abdicates us from any real responsibility to do the work to turn things around. We have the God given power to choose if it is the end of the world or not. Humanity can't keep blaming God for our outcomes, but rather thanking God for creating us to be an incredibly resourceful species capable of extraordinary things, especially when God inspires, motivates us, and gives us the courage, intelligence and strength to face all odds.

We have to be committed to sharing the good news that we are loved, forgiven, and have God given capabilities to take care of our people and our problems. Let us continue to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem and lovingly, by example and respectful conversation, bring others along with us on the path of healing. May it be so for us all. AMEN

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