

Encouragement: Then and Now

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year B: Pentecost 26: Mark 13:1-8, Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!”² Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵ Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’^[a] and they will lead many astray. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸ 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.

Jesus, knowing what was to come not only for Him but for His followers encourages them to stay close to God. We, through the Hebrews reading, are encouraged to do the same.

The old man sat next to his window with his hands folded on his well-worn Bible. He looked up at the clear blue sky. Once again, like he did each and every day he bowed his head in prayer.

“Holy God, you alone are God, you alone are Lord. I do not presume to know you or your mind or your ways. You alone can do as you wish; when and how you wish. But, if I might be so bold, I simply want you to know it’s getting a little crazy down here. Nations are rising against nations. There is war and famine and the children – oh the children – they are suffering, God. Suffering terribly. When are you coming again, Lord? When? Can it be sooner than later? (sigh) You know I love you. I will wait and watch. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.”

Chapter 13 of Mark’s Gospel has themes and language that would have been very familiar for the Jewish people of the day. The content is about the destruction of the Temple, and Christ’s second coming. For we contemporary ones, it can be confusing as all get out.

Let’s start with the image of time. In the Bible, and in our relationship with God we talk about chronos time and Kairos time. Chronos time is the time we see on our watches. It’s when the game begins, or the opening bell on Wall Street rings. Chronological time is the ping on our iphones for yet more, ‘Breaking News!’ Chronological time.

Kairos time is God's timing. The moment when God determines something needs to happen. The year that Jesus was born a babe in Bethlehem. Kairos time. God's timing. After years of seemingly unanswered prayer, God answers. Kairos time.

The Jews of Jesus' day never doubted that there would be a time when they as God's covenantal people would occupy their rightful place in the world order as God's people. God had made a covenant with them as God's chosen ones, and one day that would come to pass in all of its fullness.

But they had long given up on the idea that would arrive through human actions. It was completely dependent upon God's kairos and intervention on their behalf. That was called the Day of the Lord. God, like a mother giving birth, would give birth to a new world, a new order, a complete re-doing of all of creation.

Before this time, would be a time of trial and tribulation. The world would be shaken to its core. People would question what was happening and why. As Jesus says, "There will be wars and rumors of wars. Many will come saying, 'I am he!'"

Which is why Jesus says the stones in the Temple would topple over like dominoes. Josephus, the historian, wrote that some of the stones were forty feet long, twelve feet high, by eighteen feet wide. Herod's temple was incredible! The Temple was destroyed in 70 AD – or seventy years after Jesus' death during the wars between the Jews and Rome.

But the disciples didn't know this grandiose temple would fall. So of course, their logical question to Jesus is when?

During the time between the Old and New Testaments, there was a period when Jews knew no freedom. Their hopes and dreams for the coming of the Day of the Lord grew even more vivid. A type of literature began; the writings being called Apocalypses. The word means, 'unveiling.'

This "literature stems from a worldview that believes that everything happening on earth represents and correlates with a larger, heavenly struggle between good and evil. It therefore reads into earthly events cosmic significance and anticipates future events on earth in light of the coming battle between the forces of God and the devil. Hence, it often tries to make sense of current events and experiences by casting them in a larger, cosmic framework and in this way give comfort to people who are currently suffering or being oppressed."

(<https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/apocalypse-now>)

Jesus knew that His followers would encounter persecution after He was gone. 'Beware of many leading you astray by saying "I am he." When you hear of wars, don't be alarmed. The end is still to come. It's only the beginning of the birthpangs.' All of Jesus' predictions came true. Nero persecuted Christians and they died for their faith.

I think today, that many Christians can get caught between two extremes. Either we don't think about Jesus' return at all. We don't reflect on God's Kairos time for Jesus' second coming. Or we are so focused on when it will happen and what will happen, that is all we think about. 'Will I be ready?' What time is it now? Kronos time verses looking around to see God at work, here and now.

In Hebrews we are reminded that Christ died for all; once. That death changed and still changes everything! As Lutherans we believe God understands darkness, death, destruction, desolation because God experienced it Himself on the cross. That dear ones, is truly Good News!

Everything happening around us today, might make us think the end is near. And...we hold fast to our conviction that God is still at work in the world. In spite of what we see or hear or read or experience, God is yet at work in the world. The birth pangs, they seem to last for decades if not centuries. Do not fear. God is near.

The writer of Hebrews says, "through the waters of our Baptisms, let us hold fast to the hope God gives us. Let us meet together and encourage one another. Let us love one another."

Jesus' words were encouragement to His disciples years after He was gone. The Jewish community St. Mark represents underwent turmoil and persecution. They remembered their Lord's words.

So too, let us cling fast to the hope that no matter what is happening around us, God is present in kronos time. God will also act in God's own Kairos time. Therefore, we shall encourage one another. I invite you to turn to a neighbor and reflect together on where you see God at work right now in the world.

The old man's wife came into the living room, touching his shoulder tenderly. "My dear, do not lose hope. God hears each and every prayer of ours. He will come again. He will come again, and all will be well." Amen.

