

“End of the World as We Know It” - REM

Mark 13-1-8

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Friendship Presbyterian Church

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"That's great it starts with an earthquake, birds and snakes and aeroplanes, and Lenny Bruce is not afraid. [Just who is Lenny Bruce?]

Eye of a hurricane, listen to yourself churn  
World serves its own needs  
Don't mis-serve your own needs  
Speed it up a notch, speed, grunt, no, strength  
The ladder starts to clatter  
With a fear of height, down, height  
Wire in a fire, represent the seven games  
And a government for hire and a combat site  
Left her, wasn't coming in a hurry  
With the Furies breathing down your neck..."

When I saw the title of a colleague's sermon offered on the preaching resource called, Day1, for this week, I had to borrow it. The preacher, the Rev. Dr. Sarah Sanderson-Doughty, serves a presbyterian church in Oregon of all places. And yet, she borrowed the title of a song released in 1987 from a band from Athens Georgia called R.E.M. I thought, Hey, if a minister from Oregon is going to entitle her sermon for this Sunday the same as an R.E.M. song, I, who am serving a church in Athens, GA and grew up listening to the band, should do the same!

I remember showing the video of this song to my children years ago when they were small--picture a little 4 and 7 year old watching who could not figure out why that boy was in that cluttered house playing with his skateboard "all by himself". And, "why doesn't he have his shirt on, daddy?" Chapelwood United Methodist Church on Whitehead rd has some soccer fields Zia used to play on. I discovered in the woods back there an abandoned house that could very well have been the very house where that video was filmed. I took them back there after one of Zia's soccer games and said, "I wonder if this is the house where they filmed that boy with the skateboard?" They both thought, it could be.

"... Team by team, reporters baffled, trumped, tethered, cropped

Look at that low plane, fine, then  
Uh oh, overflow, population, common group  
But it'll do, save yourself, serve yourself  
World serves its own needs, listen to your heart bleed  
Tell me with the Rapture and the reverent in the right, right  
You vitriolic, patriotic, slam fight, bright light  
Feeling pretty psyched"

This beloved R.E.M. song is part of a long history of what we might call the apocalyptic genre. Apocalyptic visions--the foretelling or envisioning of the "End of the World"--have been around for a long long time. Dystopian concepts would emerge from time to time in the 20th century with books like *Fahrenheit 451* and movies like Frances Ford Copolla's *Apocalypse Now!* based on the Joseph Conrad novel. But now dystopian/apocalyptic themes are almost every show and movie.

What are some of your favorites---

It would seem, Lots of people seem to think it's the end of the world as we know it.

What are some reasons for people feeling like it's the end of the world as we know it?

Had the ball game turned out differently yesterday, that could have been one of the reasons.

For some maybe it feels that way after the elections Nov 5.

and for others it may have felt that way after the elections of Nov 3. 2020!

Look at events of this year that might suggest it's the end of the world as we know it:  
The horrific war continues to rage and expand in the middle east.  
The situation in Sudan seems more and more dire.  
They'll be recovering from Hurricanes Helene and Milton for years.  
Out of control Fires along the east and west coasts.  
Hottest year on record.  
The list could go on and on

Immense Suffering and high anxiety and people wondering: "Is this the end of the world as we know it."

"Six o'clock, T.V. hour, don't get caught in foreign tower  
Slash and burn, return, listen to yourself churn  
Lock him in uniform, book burning, bloodletting  
Every motive escalate, automotive incinerate  
Light a candle, light a motive, step down, step down  
Watch your heel crush, crush, uh oh  
This means no fear, cavalier, renegade and steering clear  
A tournament, a tournament, a tournament of lies  
Offer me solutions, offer me alternatives and I decline"

Jesus gets in on the end of the world apocalyptic action. The word apocalypse comes from the Greek, *apocalypsis*, which means an "unveiling" or a "revealing". According to biblical scholar Bart Erman, "Jews who subscribed to this apocalyptic worldview maintained that God had revealed to them the future, in which he would soon overthrow the forces of evil and establish his kingdom on earth." Erman suggests, "The worldview of apocalypticism --just rolls right off the tongue--apocalypticism--"originated in the turbulent history of the Jews in Palestine." Eerily ironic.

According to Erman, "most of the ancient Jews believed that God had made a covenant with his people to be their divine protector in exchange for their devotion to him through keeping his law." This is why the scribes and Pharisees were so adamant about upholding and enforcing every jot and tittle of the law. "This point of view naturally came to be challenged by political events in Palestine. If God had promised to protect and defend Israel against its enemies, how could one account for its perpetual foreign domination--by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Syrians, the Romans?"

Jesus wades into the apocalyptic conversation during the Roman occupation, and Mark is writing his gospel after the destruction of the sacred Temple.

What does Jesus have to say?

Well, He sends some mixed messages. On the one hand, he says you can read the signs that the end is coming as clearly as one reads new growth on trees as a sign that the seasons are changing. But, on the other hand, it seems he's being asked, Jesus, when? When will be that day or hour..."

To which he responds: NOBODY KNOWS

Not the angels in heaven and not the Son.

Well, Only the Father knows."

And Jesus wants to challenge those diviners who say they know when, by saying, "**Beware!**" those who say that they do know when are *deceivers*."

Jesus suggests that great suffering is a sign that the end is near, but also says not to think that wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines *are* the end. They are just the beginning of the end.

"... The other night I drifted nice continental drift divide

Mountains sit in a line, Leonard Bernstein

Leonid Brezhnev, Lenny Bruce and Lester Bangs

Birthday party, cheesecake, jellybean, boom

You symbiotic, patriotic, slam but neck,

right? right"

Something Jesus reiterates in his apocalyptic discourse is to keep awake. Stay alert. Pay attention! Be engaged!

So often when it comes to apocalyptic types of problems and suffering, it can be tempting to just throw up our hands and say I guess only God can do something, if there even is a god...

but Jesus' approach to problems and suffering it seems is to not feel helpless or hopeless in the face of them, but instead, to face them with a prayerful disposition and *respond* to them with compassion.

It's the end of the world as we know it...

Keep awake, therefore--continue to be about the good work.

So often when it comes to apocalyptic types of problems and suffering, there are many who want to escape, and suggest that we should just disregard the problems of this present world. Or better yet, let's colonize Mars.

But Jesus' approach to problems and suffering it seems is to not escape, but instead, to face them with a prayerful disposition and *respond* to them with compassion.

It's the end of the world as we know it...Keep awake--continue to be about the good work.

So often when it comes to apocalyptic types of problems and suffering, it can be easy to just ignore them.

Rationalize, "no one else seems to be concerned, why should I," and just get caught up in the flow of what everyone else seems to be doing....

But Jesus' approach to problems and suffering it seems is to not just go along with what everyone else is doing, but instead, to join with others are willing to face this world full of need with a prayerful disposition and *respond* with compassion.

It's the end of the world as we know it...how do you feel?

The preacher who offered this sermon title offers a conclusion to this apocalyptic passage from Mark. The [Rev. Dr. Sarah Sanderson-Doughty](#), preaches:

"Frankly, even if this is "the end of the world as we know it" we can feel fine. Because we worship the God who brings life out of death. So stay alert!" Engage the end of the world demonstrating the coming kingdom of God's mercy and love. Amen.