

“In the Meantime”
Mark 13:1-8,
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I'm going to tell you a story this morning that has no beginning and no end...a story named “in the meantime.” When I was a little girl about 9 or 10, I remember lying on a small patch of grass in front of our home in Texas. It was the only patch of grass that didn't have thorns--we called them goat heads. I would lie there and look up at the big, blue sky of Texas with those white puffy clouds, and think how beautiful they were and how soft the grass felt and how good the wind felt and THEN I would be struck with feelings of fear and terror because I imagined that behind one of those beautiful clouds Jesus was about to come to earth again and would I be going to heaven or that other place. The first 25 years of my life were spent mainly in that state of fear and terror. Perhaps that's why I try to avoid preaching on any text that might be called apocalyptic literature or scripture sometimes associated with the end of the world as we know it. These texts remind me of how long I lived fearing the “end times.”

But today we're in that in between time when the old church year ends and the new church year is to begin next Sunday with Advent. And this passage speaks to all those in between times of our lives. This text is called the “little apocalypse.” The word “apocalypse” actually comes from the Greek for “uncovering” or “revealing” and those words don't necessarily imply a second coming of judgment. To uncover or to reveal means to see something that one couldn't see before, perhaps to see a person or idea that we could not see before. So this passage points to apocalyptic events that lead us to a revealing or uncovering of new possibilities.

In the book Amazing Grace, Kathleen Norris writes that “uncovering what we'd just as soon keep hidden is a frightening prospect.” She says that apocalypse is not meant to beat us into submission so that we live in fear and we are focused on what folks sometimes call “pie in the sky”. But rather apocalypse is to reveal or understand so we may change the way we live “in the meantime.” Kathleen Norris lives in North Dakota. She says that the farmers and ranchers there have a special expression called “next-year country.” “Next year rains will come at the right time; next year I won't get hailed out; next year winter won't set in before my hay is hauled in for winter feeding.” But just because these farmers and ranchers talk about “next-year country” doesn't mean they don't plough, plant, and work the soil in the meantime. “Next-year country” reminds them to pay attention to reading the fields today, to attentive to the present, to live “in the meantime.”

What did Jesus mean in today's text? He's responding to a disciple who looks admiringly at the buildings of Jerusalem. The temple was the World Trade Center of their day. It was a place of commerce as well as worship. There was always a bake sale going on or a rummage sale. The temple had become an idol to the work of human hands. Jesus says: “See these buildings?” He says look at what's around you. Pay attention to your world. “Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” He's saying “some things just don't last.” We know this to be true. The Titanic that wasn't supposed to sink, sank. September 11th wasn't supposed to happen. Buildings fell--barely one stone was left upon another. This fall fires burned homes where people were supposed to live and young fire fighters lost their lives.

Jesus says that sometimes things happen that are not supposed to happen, and some things that are suppose to last forever, simply don't. These words were a reality check for the disciples and they were shocked. They think he knows something they don't know. And they ask “when, Lord, when will these buildings go down?” They want to prepare for the future (rather than live in the present). But Jesus doesn't tell them the month, day, and year. He says lots will happen before then--wars and rumors of wars--nations will rise up against nations, earthquakes and famines will come. But these are just birth pangs. The end hasn't come, we're still in labor. It's worth noting that labor usually brings the joy of new life, not disaster. Jesus never answers the question of when! I guess if they needed to know the date, he would have told them. His message was meant to focus

theirs and our attentions not on the end of time, but on how we live “in the meantime”.

The Good News is that Jesus also lived in the meantime. And it was in the meantime that he blessed children, healed the sick, showed compassion for the poor and those that no one else would pay attention to. So as followers of Jesus we’re to do the same--bless little children, help heal the sick and brokenhearted, show compassion. We’re not to fearfully focus on some cataclysmic event at some unknown time in the future, we are to live “in the meantime.” Sometimes in the meantime is not so bad; the living is easy. But sometimes “in the meantime” is really hard, and we long for the sweet by and by. As Abraham Lincoln said, “It’s not the years of your life that counts, but the life in your years.” Within this faith community several of you have reached that magical number of 80. And for the fullness of your years and the blessing those years, we give God praise. The best thing for us folks “in the meantime” to do is to live with gratitude for a new day that brings even the possibility that there may be new days to come. And with each day we witness to what God has done in our lives. We give a testimony of praise!

Psalms 147 is a testimony of praise. Here’s a modern translation of this Psalm.

How sweet to sing to you, Lord, and to thank you for all your blessings. You rebuild what has been ruined and recreate what was lost. You heal the brokenhearted; you are medicine for their wounds. You lift up the afflicted and give them the courage to endure. You count the myriad stars and call each one by its name. Infinite is your power, incalculable your wisdom. You strew ice crystals like bread crumbs; the earth becomes bitter cold. You breathe warm winds and the ice melts; you blow and the waters flash. You cover the sky with clouds; you send down your rain to the earth, Making grass grow on the hills and plants to nourish all humankind. You give the wild animals their prey; you feed the young ravens when they cry. You delight in the power of the horse and take pleasure in the legs of an athlete. But most, you rejoice in a pure heart and in those who let you shine through them. You give them joy in your joy and you bless their loves with your love. You bring your peace to their families... You send your wisdom to their minds... Above all others they are blessed, because they can hear you speak (though your love speaks in all people, in the silence of every heart).

The story of our lives is a story of living “in the meantime”. The past is behind us; if we’re smart, we learn from it. The future is unknown; it holds many possibilities; it gives us hope. It also encourages us “in the meantime” to pay attention to what is right here, right now. And whether it’s good times or bad, the response of God’s faithful throughout all time is to give God praise for the gift of life “in the meantime.” Our story has no beginning and no end; we live within a circle of hope; a circle of love that has no beginning and no end. God is in our past forgiving us, God is in our future calling us. God is in the present loving us. For the gift of love and life “in the meantime”. Praise be to God!