

OCC Home Devotional

For Family or Group Discussion, or Individual Reflection
Rev. Rob Fredrickson • Sunday, August 27, 2017

"Wonderful and Scary"

As he walked away from the Temple, one of his disciples said, "Teacher, look at that stonework! Those buildings!"

Jesus said, "You're impressed by this grandiose architecture? There's not a stone in the whole works that is not going to end up in a heap of rubble."

Later, as he was sitting on Mount Olives in full view of the Temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew got him off by himself and asked, "Tell us, when is this going to happen? What sign will we get that things are coming to a head?"

Jesus began, "Watch out for doomsday deceivers. Many leaders are going to show up with forged identities claiming, 'I'm the One.' They will deceive a lot of people. When you hear of wars and rumored wars, keep your head and don't panic. This is routine history, and no sign of the end. Nation will fight nation and ruler fight ruler, over and over. Earthquakes will occur in various places. There will be famines. But these things are nothing compared to what's coming.

"And watch out! They're going to drag you into court. And then it will go from bad to worse, dog-eat-dog, everyone at your throat because you carry my name. You're placed there as sentinels to truth. The Message has to be preached all across the world.

"When they bring you, betrayed, into court, don't worry about what you'll say. When the time comes, say what's on your heart—the Holy Spirit will make his witness in and through you.

"It's going to be brother killing brother, father killing child, children killing parents. There's no telling who will hate you because of me.

"Stay with it—that's what is required. Stay with it to the end. You won't be sorry; you'll be saved."

— Jesus, in Mark 13:1-13 (The Message)

Last Sunday, I preached here at OCC. The two readings I chose were Philippians 4:4-9 and the above passage from Mark 13. Sonja Coster was our gracious and magnificent liturgist.

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As Sonja came forward to read, I commented that some might find the Mark passage to be a bit "obscure." Sonja responded that, after previewing the readings, she wasn't sure what I had in store for the sermon—but that it would be "either wonderful or scary." I replied that it might in fact turn out to be a little of both.

The title of last Sunday's message was "Sentinels to Truth," a phrase taken right from Mark 13:9 in the biblical paraphrase known as "The Message." The topic at hand was truth, and our often-precarious relationship to it. To be a *bona fide* "sentinel to truth" for God is no easy role, to say the least!

But time prevented me from unpacking another aspect of this passage that I think is noteworthy. Many believe this to be Jesus forecasting to four of his disciples what the end of the world will look like—as in the end of history, the apocalypse, Armageddon, the tribulation, the rapture, etc. Many view this passage as Jesus laying the predicate for Hal Lindsey's *Late, Great Planet Earth*.

But it's important to be aware that this is far from a unanimous interpretive view. There are plenty of biblical scholars and theologians who read these verses and do not believe them to be predictions about the end of the world as we know it.

Instead, some believe Jesus was describing some of the trials that these four disciples themselves would undergo in their lifetimes. In this view, Jesus wasn't talking about the end of the world, or about anything that may happen many centuries later. Rather, he was talking about how each of them would have his loyalty, allegiance, commitment, endurance, and depth of faith tested in just the remaining decades of their earthly lives.

They would be asked to disavow Jesus to avoid punishment. They would be asked to renounce their faith to avoid torture. They would be asked to turn away from the worship of the one true God to avoid execution. But the grim prognostications end with a promise: that those who remain steadfast through all the harrowing travails will be rewarded. "Stay with it to the end. You won't be sorry; you'll be saved."

There's no shortage of "end times" preaching out there. But, in my view, it's generally more fruitful to focus on how we live our lives as people of faith in the here and now. I find challenge of discipleship to be more compelling than doomsday.