

Sermon Mark 13:1-8  
26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Who here knows the song by the rock group REM, 'It's the end of the world as we know it'? If I had been on my game, I would have asked the choir to sing it, but that probably would have been quite a challenge.

Anyway, it's a very upbeat song. 'It's the end of the world as we know it – and I feel fine.'

Really? Fine?!

When we think about the end of the world, don't we rather feel apprehensive, or scared, or horrified? I mean, there is a whole movie genre out there about the apocalypse, when everything we know and hold dear comes to a violent and cataclysmic end, and there is death and devastation is all around. How could we feel 'fine' about that?

But such movie scenarios are meant to be extreme. I believe that the end of the world as we know it happens all the time – and in much more subtle ways.

Just yesterday, at the ladies' luncheon in honor of Kathy's retirement, at our end of the table we talked about the deterioration of politics in this country. How the current divide is unlike anything that any of us ever experienced before. How the world we knew – for example the world in which Jimmy Carter was president – has come to an end. A world, in which values like integrity, honor, dignity, solidarity, and community were still cherished and upheld.

The world as we knew it ended on 9/11. The world as we know it ends whenever we experience violence, disaster, and destruction.

The world as we know it ends whenever our personal life changes drastically – when we are forced to change our life circumstances, when a close relationship falls apart, when we are confronted with mortality and death, when we are disappointed or betrayed – and our whole world seems to be crushing down, and we stand in the midst of the ruins of our lives we built so carefully. And, no, we don't feel fine in such times, we feel awful, we feel defeated, abandoned, exhausted, angry, and sad. Because we have lost something that was precious to us. And it takes us a long time to recover, and to rebuild our lives.

Now this is the end of the church year – a period on our church calendar during which we hear a lot about the end time, the end of the world as we know it. And we have quite a few unsettling lessons that talk about destruction – lessons that even bleed over into Advent, a time we want to feel warm and cozy and Christmas-y. And today’s gospel lesson is such an unsettling, maybe even upsetting lesson, as Jesus talks about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem: that not one stone will be left upon the other. Jesus predicts the end of an era, of a moment in history – a painful end at that. Yes, indeed, the magnificent temple in Jerusalem, deemed indestructible, will be destroyed by the Roman occupiers after a Jewish uprising in the year 70 AD. Nothing we so carefully construct here on earth – be it buildings, or societies, or our lives – lasts forever.

But did you notice that Jesus’ words in today’s gospel are not primarily about destruction and devastation? He also says that he will tear down the temple and build it up again in three days. Now of course this is an allegory and refers to Jesus himself and his resurrection on the third day after his crucifixion; but these words also give us hope that destruction and death won’t have the last word, but rather reconciliation and life. God is not about violent and utter destruction. God is not out to get us somehow. God is about life. And sometimes, in order to create something new, the old has to be destroyed. Whoever has ever done some home remodeling knows that. There usually comes a time on those home remodeling shows on HGTV where people get out their sledgehammers and proclaim, with glee, ‘It’s demo time!’

And if we look at it this way, the line, ‘It’s the end of the world as we know it – and I feel fine,’ makes some sense...

Sometimes, not one stone remains on the other. But that doesn’t necessarily mean utter destruction. In the olden days, often an old or crumbling building would be dismantled, the stones or bricks carefully taken down, and something new would be built with it. Many an old church, monastery or castle was transformed in houses, roads and barns. I hope this can be an allegory and an image of hope for us today.

We all have experienced how our carefully constructed lives came tumbling down by some unexpected blow at some point. We have seen the deterioration of many values that are based on Jesus’ greatest command to us: to love God - and our neighbor. Sometimes it seems that the foundations of things that gave us a sense of security in the past – like democracy, freedom, and communities in which

everyone contributed their fair share – have crumbled. And all we are left with are ruins.

And there are always those who pick up the stones of what has fallen apart and throw them, intending more harm and destruction.

But it is our call to pick up all the stones of what falls apart – and to carefully rebuild. Rebuild hope. Rebuild trust. Rebuild honor and respect and integrity. Rebuild relationships. To be there to mend and restore when it's the end of the world as we – or others – know it. So that there can be healing for a world that longs for new life to the fullest for all.

I hope we remember all this during this season that talks so much about endings. I hope we remember that, whenever the end of one world happens, another one begins. And that it's also up to us what this new world looks like. Amen