

Date: Sunday November 15, 2009

Scripture: Mark 13:1-8

Title: “1975, Again”

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): There are endings that will occur to that which we care about – the Temple being the example in today’s passage.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): God is always with us through any ending that occurs and God is a God of beginnings. Thanks be to God.

(Remember, it’s all about God!)

The year was 1975. Thirty-four years ago. Remember? Well, to assist with our recall and to get our minds in the year of 1975 that marked only the three quarters point of the 20th Century, one year before our nation’s bicentennial, here are some fun facts and not so fun facts from 1975:

The city of Saigon is surrendered and the remaining Americans are evacuated ending the Vietnam War on April 30; Mitchell, Halderman, and Ehrlichman, we don’t even have to use their first names, were all found guilty in the Watergate cover-up and sentenced to jail on February 21. The President, Gerald R. Ford escapes an assassination attempt on Sept 5. On Sept 22, the President escapes another assassination attempt.

Pittsburgh wins the Super Bowl over the Vikings; Cincinnati beats Boston in the World Series 4 games to 3. UCLA wins the NCAA Basketball Championship with Oklahoma winning in football.

A new TV show, Saturday Night Live, premiered on NBC. One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest sweeps the Oscars with Jaws, Nashville, and Dog Day Afternoon

being other top movies of the year. Oil went over \$13 a barrel, the unemployment rate was 9.2 %, and Jimmy Hoffa disappeared.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed the year at 858 points; the average cost of new house was estimated to be \$39,300.00 with the average annual income at \$14,100.00; the average monthly rent was \$200.00; the cost of a gallon of gas was 44 cents; and the average cost of a new car was \$4,250.00.

Notable births included Tiger Woods and Angelina Jolie. Notable deaths included Aristotle Onassis and Casey Stengel (Websites: InfoPlease and PeopleHistory).

Here at Immanuel we had 10 people confirmed, 9 new members, 13 deaths, 2 baptisms, and 9 marriages during 1975. We were one year shy of our centennial. Does any of this 1975 information sound familiar? What do you remember about 1975?

I mention all this today, as I said to help us think back to 1975 and then to see if there is any recall about the speculation in 1975 that the world would be destroyed by fire. Does that ring a bell? That end of the world rumor began in 1966 and persisted for the next nine years. Of course, it didn't come to pass. And that wasn't the first such idea of its kind. There have been predictions throughout our history about the world ending, like Y2K, and so far, all the predictions have fallen short. Still, there are those who again predict the end is on the horizon, like the prophets of doom predicting total destruction of the world in 2012. In doing so, this time they point to the ending of the Mayan calendar. Regardless of the reasons, throughout history, apocalyptic ideas have run rampant. 1975 was no exception.

I remember the prediction of destruction in 1975 and remember wondering what it would be like for fire to ravage the world. As a 12 year old boy I didn't have a full comprehension of what that would mean although I do remember thinking as 1975 approached that we will just have to see what happens. I also remember thinking that if there was a worldwide fire-storm I would probably get out of school. Overall though I found it far-fetched to think the world was going to end then.

Now today I still find it to be quite a stretch to think the world will end anytime soon. Keeping in mind that all good things must come to an end, I believe that the world as we know it will end at some point, but it probably won't be today, tomorrow, or 2012. I had a man tell me just a few weeks ago that the end was near. I smiled and listened politely, then changed the subject to the colors of the pretty fall leaves.

That man's point and the point of so many others is that when you consider some of the problems in today's world we can easily predict the end. There doesn't seem to be any end in sight to the all conflict in the Middle East. Thousands are unemployed in the US now with unemployment over 10%. Scandals have invaded Wall Street. Natural disasters occur all over the globe. Suicide bombings are reported every week. At times we seem to be getting worse at trying to live together in the world. That is true. But does it mean the end is coming soon?

That was the question that Jesus' closest disciples asked when he told them that someday the temple would be destroyed. They were impressed, if not proud, of the beautiful temple that symbolized the presence of God. If Jesus could predict the end of the temple he must surely know when the end of the world would happen.

But Jesus responds by saying that “no one knows.” (Mark 13:32, NRSV)

What else did Jesus say to his disciples? Don't be misled. Don't let soothsayers and wizards and evangelists mislead you by giving you predictions of the end of time. This is nothing more than a scare tactic to coerce people into joining their organization. Interestingly, one man predicting the end in 2012 also sells products that he says we might need for a catastrophic event. Another man in Kansas is refurbishing an old underground missile silo getting ready for doomsday. I wonder why he thinks that the end of the world wouldn't affect his underground shelter.

Now it is true that tragedy and catastrophic events happen in the course of human lives. They are a part of life. They were in Jesus' day, just as they are in our day. The temple that Jesus said would be destroyed was destroyed about forty years later (Lectionary Homiletics). That destruction of the temple, which was the center of the Jewish people's lives, might be equated to the destruction of the World Trade Centers, a destruction that hit us at the core of our lives. Those two attacks also share another similarity. Both happened but neither were the end of the world.

When things are not going well around us we tend to come unglued. We get anxious and our days seem dark and gloomy. We are filled with despair and hopelessness, therefore being “frozen” or “stuck.” With this feeling, some try to escape through drugs and alcohol. Others turn to a deeper sense of loss with gambling. Subtle and not so subtle addictions can easily take control. Depression and withdrawal from the world become common responses. As we talked about last week, we can become so preoccupied with what might happen we miss what

is actually happening. That kind of preoccupation can be an excuse from taking any responsibility for our neighbors and others in need right now. “If the world is coming to an end, why feed the hungry, help the homeless, or cloth the naked?”

Besides warning us not to be misled Jesus tells us to “endure.” Steadfastness is the name of the game. “Hang in there, keep the faith” is what he was saying. Of course that is not always easy, especially for someone who is faced with a terminal illness, someone who has experienced a family tragedy, or for a society when their very core is struck. How do you tell someone who just lost their job or a loved one to “hang in there” (Lectionary Homiletics)?

I am reminded of a well known 21st Century televangelist who I don’t watch but just happened to see while I was making a point to a friend about why I don’t watch. This motivational speaker, I struggle calling him a preacher, was talking about people in the hospital. He made a comment about not just “wallowing” in your hospital room. He went on to say, and I remember this quite clearly, “Don’t stay in bed, get up, and pull yourself up by your bootstraps. That’s what God wants you to do.” This speaker admittedly doesn’t make pastoral care calls. To which I say thank God.

The truth of the matter is sometimes we simply don’t feel the presence of God. There are times when God doesn’t seem to be real, let alone nearby. There are times of turmoil and it can feel like the end is near. But Jesus says don’t be misled. Everyone faces times when familiar things pass away and life as we know it fades from existence. Those are the end times we know and experience. The times when part of us is dying and much uncertainty and fear surround us. Yet, when that

happens part of the uncomfortable feeling we have is the birth pangs of something new that is about to occur (Lectionary Homiletics).

I suggest today that the end times we need to focus on are the end of the fear, isolation, and limitations that can grip us for a variety of reasons and that instead we are to hang in there with Jesus and embrace the strength, courage, and possibility available to us in the name of God. That doesn't mean pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps when we are flat on our back, but it does mean acknowledging that God knows and cares about what we are experiencing.

You see, throughout all times past, present, and times to come, God is with us and that is very good news. Throughout every ending God is here with a beginning. And what do we know about God; God is always a God of hope; God is always a God of guidance. God is God of eternity and of possibility and of promise. God doesn't create in order to destroy. God creates because of love and God wants us to endure and to keep our faith strong. That's the message with the disciples on the hill overlooking Jerusalem and the temple. God says, "Don't be led astray," and that's my message today. Predictions will come and predictions will go, but God is with us always. That was true in the year 75 C.E., around the time Mark was written, it was true in 1975, the year of the supposed great fire, it is true this year, this day, and it will be true in 2012 and beyond. God is good all the time. Let us pray.

God,

We give thanks for your goodness. In the midst of trials and tribulations and predictions of turbulent and terrible times, we hope to remember your eternal

presence. Guide us to live with focus on your way of love and forgiveness and to forget the words and messages that distract and distance us from you. So we pray this day, Amen.

Offering: Let us give our money today with the vision of helping to end problems that plague our world. The ushers will please come forward.

Dedication: Lord, accept and bless this that we offer and multiple these gifts used for the good of your world. This we pray, Amen.

Benediction: Go forth into the world with the promises of God and with a new and living way opened to us by God. Go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

Lectionary Homiletics; www.goodpreacher.com; 2009.

Website; 1975; www.infoplease.com ; 2009.

Website; 1975; www.peoplehistory.com ; 2009.