



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life-giving, God, King of Kings. Amen.

Listening to this morning's gospel, it strikes me that it's probably hard to grasp just how devastating Jesus's prediction about the temple would've been for those disciples. The temple, after all, was the center of Jewish life. Generations in construction, it was a marvel of civil engineering. Its base twice the size of the Great Pyramid of Giza. The stones used in its construction were among the largest ever moved by human hands. And it was covered by enormous plates of gold that glowed so brilliantly in the sun that an ancient historian claimed it could actually damage your eyes.

But more than a physical monument for Jews, it was the place where Heaven touched the Earth, the literal dwelling place of God, the fulfillment of God's promise that He would always be near His people. And so for Jesus to tell them that not one stone will be left upon another, it would have been unimaginable to the disciples in just about every way. But Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on to say that before the end times, peaceful nations will crumble into violence. Once prosperous will face famine, families divided against one another, and His followers persecuted for believing such things like the poor should be cared for, the vulnerable protected.

And I know some of us can hear a text like this and wonder: is he talking about today? As such dreadful portents, as Jesus calls them, seem to be everywhere. War in Europe and in the Holy Land. Divisions here at home. Institutions being dismantled. Safety nets at risk. Freedoms that we once thought we'd won, suddenly threatened once more. One stone after another, seemingly being thrown down.

Just the other day, two women who we had never met, never had been to this church before, came in in the middle of the week with a newly issued marriage license. They had heard we were a welcoming church and they hoped that there might be a priest who would marry them right on the spot, because they were concerned that the option might not always be there. And we were happy to do that, by the way.

Last week we had a forum where social servants agencies we partner with, those on the front lines, serving the most vulnerable, shared example after example

after example of how the world's richest country seems to be walking away from those most in need. And if all of this puts you in a bleak mood, well, all I can say is we have never been a church that put its head in the sand. As long as I have been here, this has always been a church willing to speak truth in love, and then roll up its sleeves to make a difference.

But I get it. You know, that disconnect, that gap between the world as it is and the one that Jesus calls us to build, it is disheartening sometimes. And I suspect that's exactly how the disciples are feeling as well as they try to make sense of what Jesus is saying. And for the record, I don't think Jesus is warning us so we can start preparing. I don't think He's interested in us building shelters or stockpiling food. I also don't think He's interested in us trying to pinpoint the date and try to figure out the end times on the calendars. So many people have tried. I hear these kind of apocalyptic texts instead as less of a prediction and more of a reminder that we are always living in a kind of end time.

As I was preparing the sermon this week, the witness from last week was still ringing in my ears. And for those who didn't hear it, Rich Lamb, a long time member, spoke courageously about the unexpected death of his wife, Betsy, followed less than two years later by news that his only son had tragically died as well. And as I listened to his story, I tried to put myself in his shoes. I tried to imagine what it might have felt like. And the best I came up with was it must have seemed like his world was coming to an end, a kind of personal apocalypse, if there could ever be such a thing.

And I know many of you, many of you have lived through such end times, moments of your own unimaginable grief, unwanted change, the loss of something that you thought would last forever. And I know there are some of you in the midst of such a time even now. It's those moments in life when the rug is just yanked out from under us. And the things that we once took for granted, the people that we thought would always be there, the sense of identity that we thought we finally had figured out, it all just gets ripped away. Sometimes without any warning. It happens when someone dies, but it also happens in the collapse of a career, the loss of a business, a betrayal by a trusted friend, an unwanted divorce, financial disaster, a life-changing diagnosis, even just getting old, experiencing all the ways our body starts to fail us. All of these things can feel like end times in all the ways that matter.

Just look at the disciples today. Whatever their reaction to His predictions, it pales in comparison to what they themselves would experience just a few days later, as Jesus is arrested and publicly executed in the most brutal and humiliating way possible. And just like that, their hopes of a new kingdom, ripped away. Their faith shattered. Having to go into hiding because their very lives were in danger. Again, end times in all the ways that matter.

But I think it's helpful to know that although we associate the word "apocalypse" with destruction and end times, and I know Hollywood certainly does, in scripture an apocalypse is not about predicting the future so much as it is a revelation about the present. The Greek word *apokalypsis* means to unveil, to uncover, to reveal what's really going on. And so what might our end times be revealing to us? The fault lines. The cracks in our life that we knew were there, but tried to ignore. The false images that we have been clinging to and projecting wherever we can. The idols. The attachments that we put our trust in. The truths that we've been afraid to face.

And perhaps more importantly, more hopefully, the end times can reveal to us the grace of God that has been with us all along. I can remember very vividly facing what felt like my own end times. About 15 years ago, my personal life was coming apart at the seams. I felt like a failure. I was ashamed. I was scared. Would I lose my house? What will my friends think? What is my family going to say? And what's wrong with me that this could even happen? All that stuff racing through my mind. And it was all happening in secret because it all cut so deep. I couldn't bring myself to tell anyone. And the irony was I was working at a church at the time, my office, not a hundred feet from the sanctuary, and yet it never occurred to me to share any of this with God. So consumed by my fear, so determined to try to manage it, to keep it all to myself, to keep up appearances, to hold it all together on my own.

They talk about fight, flight, or freeze. I did them all. I did everything. Everything but the one thing I needed to do. That is, until the day I found myself in the cathedral where I was working, picking up some extra chairs for an event I was putting on. And out of the corner of my eye, I saw the prayer station, the candles flickering, much like the ones we have right over here. And I thought to myself, you know, maybe I should light a candle. That's something that a religious person would do. Maybe that'll help.

Well, I never made it to the candle. As I approached the kneeler, I just fell to my knees sobbing and everything that I had been carrying, all that stuff that I'd been trying to hold in and to manage, it all just came flooding out. Jesus says today that when the end times come for us, don't try to prepare your defense. Don't try to figure it out. I'll give you the words. And on that day, the words He gave me, the only words I could manage, I am lost. Help me find the way.

My personal apocalypse, if you will, it revealed to me my need to surrender. I had been baptized only a couple years at that point. I came to church, obviously. I was working there. I said the prayers. I was going around the country, teaching classes to other churches. But looking back, when the chips were down, I was still doing life on my terms, under my power, relying on myself and my expertise, and my resources and my ingenuity. That is, until I burned through all of them, and it

wasn't until then that I arrived at the place I should have started, when I should have put all of this in God's hands.

And believe me, I was never one to quote people's slogans like, "Let go, let God." You know, "God's got this." That stuff always seemed like a kind of bumper sticker to me. And I think I'm a practical guy at heart and I always wondered, how would that even work anyway? Well, let me just say I'm a believer now. And don't ask me how it works. I don't think I could tell you. There is no map, there is no process to follow. All I know is that something happens when you open yourself up, when you surrender, when you stop trying to do it on your own. When you let go enough to let other people in, somehow God fills that space. Fills the space you were working so hard to fix.

And in doing that, God reveals that His grace, His presence, was with us all along. All those nights that I was toiling away, agonizing over what I should do, worrying about what was going to happen next, Jesus was right there. All those times that I was terrified about how people might judge me or what they might say, Jesus was right there. And when I did finally open up, when I took a risk and asked for help, Jesus was there. And the compassion I was shown, and the countless ways people like yourselves reached out and took me in, carried me along.

And Jesus was also there a couple of years later, when I looked back on that terrible time, and He showed me that what I thought was an ending was a whole new beginning, more beautiful, more amazing than I could have ever dreamed, much less devised on my own. Jesus is King. And in the mystery of His death and His rising, our painful endings have within all of them, the hope of resurrection as well. A hope bound up in our willingness to surrender, that the reality is everything ends. All of our temples fall. All of our monuments will crumble. Everything is always ending.

But with the Lord of Lords, it is never the final word. God is always doing a new thing. Even when it's most dark, even when the enemies of love seem to be getting the upper hand, God is always doing a new thing and it's going to be beautiful. So let us take that hope into our hearts today. Let it bring you some peace in turbulent times. And may it continue to give the strength and courage we need to keep speaking truth and love, to keep rolling up our sleeves and to keep making a difference on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.