

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 13: 10-11
SECOND LESSON: Mark 13: 24-37
November 29, 2020
FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

“Living on the Edge of Eternity”
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

I’ve never been able to quite figure out why the creators of the lectionary, the suggested scripture readings throughout the church year, opt to put the end times at Advent. Aren’t we talking about the beginning here? Why is it that we go to the end? People don’t want to hear about endings during the Christmas season! Those with young children are struggling to keep up and figure out how to afford some Christmas magic for their kids on Christmas morning. Others find themselves trying frantically to recreate some kind of nostalgic form of happiness that always seems to slip away at the last minute. But no one can cram the malls this year. Holiday parties will not be able to happen. Santa Claus is behind plexiglass! Even big family gatherings are highly questionable. This year Covid 19 has changed everything. And this year we also face the end of one presidency and the beginning of a very different one in January. Every ending offers a new beginning, and every beginning is a form of ending. With all that has happened in the past year, horrendous fires, devastating floods, racial injustice and violence and over a quarter of a million Americans dead from a pandemic virus, perhaps this Christmas season we can remember that it is God, not stuff, that will bring us peace and joy. It is love, not greed, that heals.

The passage of scripture we read this morning is written in the form of what is known as apocalyptic. In fact, it’s called the “little Apocalypse.” And apocalyptic is like code. The language is heavily symbolic. If we take it literally, as some people are wont to do with the apocalypse known as Revelation, we will probably freak out. The chronology laid out in the Little Apocalypse is classic. There will be terrible suffering followed by total darkness. The sun, moon and stars will cease to give light. The Son of Man will then come with power and glory and angels will gather up all of God’s chosen ones. And to further add to this intensity, we don’t know when all of this will happen. All we can do is look for the signs, and people in every generation have exhausted the rest of us by doing just that and claiming that now is the time. Hal Lindsey started writing books in the 1970s that the world was about to end and kept spinning out new books for years. Interestingly, Lindsey who is now 91, rolled the profits from his books into long-term real estate investments.

For the literal minded it is also very confusing that Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass

away.” If we take “this generation” literally we know that that was certainly not the case. The generation of those alive during Jesus’ day is long gone.

The message, once again, seems to be all about being ready. We are to be alert, like servants waiting for their master to come home. We are to remain on watch. And we don’t really want to do this. It’s boring. It’s exhausting. But from another point of view we all know that safety often does rely on constant vigilance. Part of Delaware County’s computer system is down right now because it has been hacked and is being held for \$500,000 ransom. They can’t access police reports, payroll and any number of other database files. I live in Delaware County. I’m a bit concerned! Clearly cyber security was not on watch. Soldiers throughout time and place have been executed for falling asleep while on watch. That was certainly the case with the Roman army. To “watch” means to stay alert, eyes open and attention focused. To watch is very, very important.

What we are to watch for is God’s time. Jesus said, “You do not know when that time will come.” We can miss it if we’re not aware. But here’s the interesting thing. We have one word for time. Greek has two. Chronos, from where we get the word chronological, is ordinary time. It is one thing comes after another time. It is “the doctor’s appointment is at” time. But the word here is Kairos, and we don’t really have a word for Kairos. Kairos is special time, it is a season, an occasion, a time of fulfillment when everything comes together. Kairos is perfect time. It is that pivotal moment in history that we only see in hindsight. If we miss something in chronos time we can reschedule. To miss something in Kairos time is to miss the opportunity of a lifetime. I certainly know a little bit about that. My great-grandfather once came home from college all excited about meeting a young man on the train who wanted him to invest in his new business. My great-grandfather was all for it! But his older conservative parents pooh poohed the whole thing and talked him out of it. The young man’s name? **Henry Ford**. Yep. That’s right. We blew it.

In God’s hands time is measured differently. Most of the time we are all caught up in chronos time. We have a schedule to keep, things to do, lists to cross off. Kids need to be taken places. Bosses need to be placated. Jobs need to be completed. In my head I always picture the year as a mountain. We climb steadily through November and December preparing for Christmas, and then plateau in January, until a slow descent begins in February to the flat level plain known as summer. Now is the time of preparation with so much to do! Except that this year is not like any other year. We’ve just come through a very different type of Thanksgiving, and we may well have a very different type of Christmas ahead. It is hard to celebrate being together when we are carefully social distancing from one another. Instead of cramming in like we usually do, this year we were spaced far apart, and there were many missing from the table.

We know how to prepare for things. We do it all the time. We prepared for a different kind of Thanksgiving. We prepare every year for Christmas and we will do it this year too, despite the fact that things will be different. We know how to keep our overall focus amid many distractions. And this is what God asks of us. We must not forget that we live on the edge of eternity. We must not forget that we exist in a time of battle. We must stay strong and faithful to the

end. We watch for the same reason that soldiers keep watch. We are at war. The war of good versus evil is ongoing. It takes no vacations. It respects no holidays. Each and every day we are to put God's purposes first, to pray and to serve. Christ may return in a thousand years or next week. It doesn't really make a difference as to how we ought to behave. We are to be alert and focused on what is truly important, to love one another, come against the Enemy's plans in prayer, speak out against injustice and corruption and show in our lives the nature of Christ to the world around us. Amen.

Isaiah 13: 10-11

10 The stars of heaven and their constellations
will not show their light.

The rising sun will be darkened
and the moon will not give its light.

11 I will punish the world for its evil,
the wicked for their sins.

I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty
and will humble the pride of the ruthless.

Mark 13: 24-37

24 "But in those days, following that distress,
"the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;

25 the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

26 "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great
power and glory. **27** And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the
four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

28 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and
its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. **29** Even so, when you see
these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. **30** Truly I
tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have
happened. **31** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass
away.

32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven,
nor the Son, but only the Father. **33** Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know
when that time will come. **34** It's like a man going away: He leaves his house
and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the
one at the door to keep watch.

35 "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the
house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the
rooster crows, or at dawn. **36** If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you
sleeping. **37** What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"