

What would you do if you knew the world was ending tomorrow? While we sit with this confusing and seemingly alarming Gospel passage from Mark, this question comes to the foreground and I want you to seriously think about it. Would you call friends and loved ones to let them know you were thinking about them? Or would you instead try to spend every last minute of your time with them? Would you seek to make amends with a friend or family member that you have a broken relationship with? Would you spend all day drinking in the wonders of Creation, spending your final hours amidst the splendour of the great outdoors? Or would eat anything and everything you ever wanted because you know there would be no consequences? Would you let loose? Or would you spend the day in prayer and contemplation over a life lived? Would you be excited or terrified? Personally I'd probably spend my last days with my family, seeking to truly relish the time with my two daughters, my wife, my parents and as many friends as I could enjoying the company of the people who are dearest to me.

Although I don't expect the world to end tomorrow, I think that this is a good question for us to ask ourselves as we enter into the Advent season, the period of preparation and waiting before Christmas. It's a good question because I think it reminds us what our priorities are, it clarifies for us what are values are, it reminds us of the things that are most important to us. I think this is important particularly at this time of year, because so many of us can get caught up in the busyness of the Christmas season. We can get caught up in the busyness of shopping, or decorating, of cooking and baking, in the making of travel plans and on and on. Asking ourselves this question, gives us time to breathe, gives us time to pause from the busyness of the season and remember the most important things in our life.

What would you do if you knew the world was ending tomorrow?

I think this is also an appropriate question to ask as we begin the Advent season with this somewhat confusing and alarming passage from the Gospel of Mark. It would seem that in this passage Jesus is warning his disciples (and us) about the end of time, about the tumultuous day of the Lord: the sun being darkened, the moon giving no light, stars falling from the sky, the heavens and the powers therein being shaken! Jesus continues his distressing trend by saying that on that day heaven and earth will pass away... While we might find the language that Jesus uses to be alarming and even a little fanciful for our modern sensibilities, I think that his words nonetheless confront us with the fact that one of the promises of our Scripture is that Christ will return, and that God will bring Creation as we know it to a good and fulfilling end. While this might be comforting to us in the face of a broken world, where children go hungry and die, where nations rise against nations in war, and indifference and hatred seem to ever present, I think that it is also quite distressing to us. It can seem distressing to us because for all the problems we see in the world, we also experience its great beauty, we experience the warmth of a loved one's hug, or the splendour of autumn leaves upon the tree, or the fierce loyalty and companionship of loving animal companion. How can we not be distressed to think that these things good things shall pass away?

So I ask you again, what would you do if you knew the world was ending tomorrow?

While we will each answer this in our own way, I think that the end of our Gospel passage gives us some guidance and comfort as we grapple with the alarming nature of the Jesus' words about the end. After all his predictions about the end Jesus says that no one will know the day or the hour so we must be vigilant, we must keep awake, as our passage concludes. Jesus goes further by describing the call to watchfulness in a mini-parable about servants who do not know when the master is coming. We typically read this passage and this mini-parable as call to watchfulness, as call to be ready for our Lord's coming again. We are undeniably called to seek the Lord, whether that be at the end of time or as our Gospel passage reminded us last week, in the faces of the hungry, the naked, the sick or the stranger.

So what would you do if you knew the world was ending tomorrow?

While Jesus is certainly calling us to vigilance, I believe there is something deeper going on in this passage. Jesus says of the slaves that they do not know if the master will come in “the **evening**, or at **midnight**, or at **cockcrow** or in at **dawn**.” Note the times of day. Evening, midnight, cockcrow and dawn. This passage in the gospel of Mark also comes just before the passion narrative. Just before the story of the events leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. The Gospel of Mark divides the passion narrative into four parts: the Lord’s Supper which is held in the **evening**; Jesus’ prayer and betrayal in Gethsemane in the **middle of the night**; Jesus’ trial and Peter’s denial at the **cockcrow** and finally Jesus coming before Pilate in the **morning**.

Jesus isn’t just calling his disciples to be watchful for his second coming at the end of the age, but rather he is declaring that his return in great power and glory is precisely the moment where he seems the weakest, precisely the moment of his greatest humiliation: the moment he is nailed to the Cross. It is at Jesus’ crucifixion that the sky darkens and the heavens shake as we read in the account in Mark chapter 15. It is precisely in this moment of utter defeat, it is precisely in this moment that seems utterly hopeless that Jesus is saying God is triumphant, that Jesus is saying is the moment of greatest hope, it is in this moment that we see the fullness of God’s love poured out for us and for the whole world, for the whole of Creation.

In a way Jesus’ death and resurrection mark the “earth and heaven” passing away, they mark a new age of creation, they represent an age marked by restoration, by redemption, by renewed life in the presence of God. Jesus says to his disciples that just as blooming fig tree marks the beginning of the summer, you will know the signs of Jesus’ coming. The love, restoration and new life poured out for us, and for all creation, in Jesus’ cross and restoration provide the signs of the new age.

So what would you do if you knew the world was ending tomorrow?

There is a story that Martin Luther, the great German Protestant Reformer, was asked a question such as this and his response was “Even if tomorrow I knew the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.” While the story is almost certainly a myth, the sentiment behind it is important. It suggests a willingness to be invested in the present, to be invested in the ordinary and everyday parts of life. There is a confidence in the love of God and a surety in the God’s promises for the future to invest energy in the present, knowing that it is not in vain.

We too can share this confidence, we too can be sure of God’s promises that we too can invest in our present. Because we too can lay claim to God’s promises in the cross and resurrection of Christ, that in time God will surely draw all of his Creation not just to an end, but a good end. We can be confident in the small things, the ordinary, the everyday things in the sure knowledge that all things will find their fulfillment in Christ, that all things will find their purpose and meaning in Christ, even if the world were to end tomorrow.

So what would you do if you knew the world was ending tomorrow? I hope that you each have something concrete in mind, I hope that over the course of the sermon you have given this serious thought, because guess what, you don’t have to wait to do these things. You can do those things now! We need not wait to know that the world is ending, that Christ is coming in his glory to do those things which seem most important to us. So what would you do if the world was ending tomorrow? What is your apple tree? What is the thing you would or should do regardless of whether the world ends tomorrow or not? Whatever you answered, my challenge is to do it today, and my challenge is: to love the ones you want to love; to finish the work you have started; to be reconciled to those who need you; to be faithful to the people and tasks around you; to undertake some small and wonderful and great endeavor. My challenge is to give company to the lonely **today**, to feed the hungry **today**, to welcome the stranger **today**. To respond to God’s outpouring of love in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, with the sure confidence that all that we do in his name, that all that we as Grace Church do in his name, from the mundane to the great endeavours will come to a good end, because Christ has come, Christ is coming and Christ will come again! Thanks be to God, Amen.