

Sunday Lesson – November 14, 2021

GOSPEL: Mark 13: 1-8

“Doomsday Deceivers”

Context

“It is easy to handle a parable speaking, disciple calling, village loving, synagogue attending Jesus, one committed to his family and who performed kind deeds for others.

For most contemporary people living in the so-called First World, it is much more difficult to understand the end-of-the-world apocalyptic prophet figure, who distanced himself from family (cf. Mark 3:20-21, 31-35; 6:1-6) and religious institutions. This is the “Jesus” of Mark 13. Apocalypticism means an “unveiling” or “revelation.” Jesus’ opening sermon revealed God’s kingdom: “The time is fulfilled, and the reign of God has come near” (Mark 1:15). Jesus performed exorcisms and considered them to be signs of the presence of the “kingdom” and the beginning of the end (cf. Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20). In chapter 13, Jesus continued unveiling other signs of the end.”

(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-33-2/commentary-on-mark-131-8-3)

Insight

“In light of the preceding passage (cf. 12:41-44), the disciple’s reaction (“Wow, look at this grand place!”) seemed really out of place in chapter 13, since such grandeur was built on the “gifts” of poor widows and others, which Jesus carefully analyzed. Other disciples — since the first one was unnamed — will be more inquisitive privately wondering about the timing of Jesus’ predictions.

In this chapter, Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, the center of religious life. When compared to Jesus’ public, symbolic action in Mark 11, his words here take on an ominous tone, similar to the prophet Jeremiah’s tone (cf. Jeremiah 7).



Do we ever witness the apocalyptic Jesus elsewhere in Mark’s Gospel? Direct teaching on the end of the world was rare and seems somewhat incompatible with the remainder of the Gospel story. There were, however, a few clues earlier in the story. At one point, he announced that “Satan” (*ho Satanas*) would come to an “end” (*telos*; 3:26). As mentioned earlier, some scholars view his exorcizing activity as representative actions signifying the reality of the *basileia* (“kingdom”) as the beginning of the end.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-33-2/commentary-on-mark-131-8-3)*

Gospel Reading

“As he walked away from the Temple, one of his disciples said, “Teacher, look at that stonework! Those buildings!” Jesus said, “You’re impressed by this grandiose architecture? There’s not a stone in the whole works that is not going to end up in a heap of rubble.” Later, as he was sitting on Mount Olives in full view of the Temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew got him off by himself and asked, “Tell us, when is this going to happen? What sign will we get that things are coming to a head?” Jesus began, “Watch out for doomsday deceivers. Many leaders are going to show up with forged identities claiming, ‘I’m the One.’ They will deceive a lot of people. When you hear of wars and rumored wars, keep your head and don’t panic. This is routine history, and no sign of the end. Nation will fight nation and ruler fight ruler, over and over. Earthquakes will occur in various places. There will be famines. But these things are nothing compared to what’s coming.” The Message

What It Could Mean?

“Mark 13:1-8 reveals a back and forth between Jesus and his disciples. In these exchanges, Jesus responds to the disciples by taking the conversation in a different direction. When one of the disciples marvels at the stones adorning the Temple, Jesus indicates that the stones will all be cast down (13:1-2). When the disciples ask Jesus when this event will happen and what

sign there will be, Jesus cautions them against being led astray (13:4-8).

Mark 13:3-37, sometimes called the “Little Apocalypse,” describes wars, earthquakes, famines, and nations rising against each other. According to Adela Yarbro Collins, “Motifs of war, earthquakes, and famines in verses 7-8 are very general apocalyptic commonplaces.” While it is hard to determine if Mark 13 anticipates the Jewish-Roman War (66-70 CE) or responds to it, these warnings on Jesus’ lips anticipate challenges faced by the Jewish community in Palestine with the war and destruction of the Temple. It is easy to imagine these events felt like a *telos*, an end, for those who watched them unfold.

Peter, James, and John asked Jesus privately about when to expect these things to happen and what to expect would happen. Their question reminds the reader that they do not understand what Jesus means by this statement. Even the disciples do not have privileged information regarding these events. Rather than describing when, Jesus tells the disciples to look out for those claiming to come in his name, echoing Jesus’ caution in Mark 12:38-44.

After Jesus cautions the disciples, he tells them of the things that are to come but does not provide a timeline. Instead, Jesus tells them these wars, earthquakes, famines, and struggles are not the culmination of the things to come. This line of thought continues until verse 37. The coming of the Son of Man is the culmination of this line of thought; in the midst of uncertainty, threat, and disaster, the messianic figure comes and gathers the elect. The *telos*, which could mean the end, goal, outcome, or culmination, is the Messiah.

Maybe the stories of life right now are our own “Little Apocalypse” or, at the very least, a sort of end to the “before times.” This precise point is where we all need to hear the Gospel, that God is always about the business of making new

futures possible. The good news of Jesus’ presence seems a fiction in the midst of crisis and disaster, and this place is precisely where preachers can imagine a different way forward for humanity. Whenever we hear reports of disaster, Mark 13 reminds us to not be led astray by messianic claimants that cannot save us; rather, we look for Jesus.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by Amanda Brobst-Renaud*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Romans 8: 19-25; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 4:5; Jude 21](#) *We are to wait eagerly for Jesus’ return*
- [James 5:8; Revelations 1:3 & 22:10](#) *“be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near”*
- [Luke 12:40](#) *“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him”*

Thought for the Day

“Isolate me, if Thou must
Train my heart to love and trust
By the arrow's inward thrust
I am reminded Thou art mine
I'll cleave to Thee, I'll not let go
For Thou alone, my heart doth know,
Hath sent this wound to bid me grow
And remind me I am Thine”
~ Vicki Baird from “Set Apart”

A Morning Prayer

“Almighty God, who fillest all things with Thy presence, we meekly beseech thee, of thy great love, to keep us near unto thee this day; grant that in all our ways and doings we may remember that thou seest us, and may always have grace to know and perceive what things thou wouldst have us to do, and strength to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Amen. ~ *An Ancient Collect*