

Series: Truth Telling
Sermon: Do Not Be Alarmed
Scripture: Mark 13:1-8

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1 As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" 2 Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." 3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" 5 Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 6 Many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

I know. On the surface that didn't do much for your fear and anxiety did it? Just be glad we stopped reading at verse 8! Just to catch us up...remember, Jesus is in the beautiful temple in Jerusalem. He has shaken the Temple up by overturning tables and calling out the Scribes for their injustice in how they treat the poor. He is mere hours away from his arrest and crucifixion. Now, I imagine, he is tired, he is frustrated. People aren't getting it. Maybe his disciples sense his mood and so they try to cheer him up...“Look up, Jesus! Look at this magnificent building. The immense stones, the careful construction.” If you have ever walked into a great Cathedral, perhaps you have felt that same awe, standing with head thrown back and marveling at the intricate work on such massive hunks of stone. Look up, Jesus! Surely, this sense of awe will snap him out of his despair. Instead, Jesus looks at them. “Really?” He thinks, “This building is what you want to be in awe over?” Perhaps the Disciples had forgotten that this is the second Jewish temple in Jerusalem...the first...the most magnificent...had been destroyed by the Babylonians, centuries before. Jesus knows it can happen again...all man-made things are vulnerable. Is it fortune telling on his part? Maybe. The temple did, in fact, get destroyed by Rome some 40 years or so later. But maybe he is just pointing out that they have misplaced their sense of awe and respect.

A temple, after all, is the place where God is said to reside. And perhaps Jesus is also giving us a subtle, heads up that he is the true temple, and, in a few hours, he too will be taken, broken down, and his body destroyed on a cross, proving solid rock is still vulnerable to hate and destruction.

His words shock the disciples into silence as they watch Jesus get up and walk out the door, walking across the way and sitting down on the Mount of Olives to stare at the Temple a bit longer. Whispers in the background are his closest disciples preparing to ask him, when will this take place? Maybe that is what breaks Jesus away from his

Temple gazing to look clearly at his beloved disciples and see the fear and worry on their faces. They can sense the end. They know something is coming. They have no idea what and they are afraid. It seems odd that what Jesus says next seems to be things that will only stir more fear...war, earthquakes, famine...destruction...the end...or at least the beginning of it. It sounds terrifying. Look at verse 7 again, though: *When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come.* I kind of like Eugene Petterson's paraphrase of that verse: *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.*

I used to visit with a lady decades ago and every visit she would recount the news stories from the night before and say, "We need to pray, Pastor. We are experiencing the end times." But Jesus says, this is not the end. It is bad...if we read past verse 8, we see it might get worse...but it is not the end. This is not what God's ending looks like. It may be what life looks like, but it is not what God's promised ending looks like.

Do you realize, for example, that there are

- approximately 55 Earthquakes every day?
- Or that at this moment, there are 71 countries reporting famine- about 309 million people going hungry, right now while you are thinking about where you will eat lunch today.
- According to the Geneva Academy who studies humanitarian law and human rights, there are currently 110 Armed Conflicts being played out around the world: 45 in the Middle East, 35 in Africa, 21 in Asia, 7 in Europe, and 6 in Latin America.

As a matter of fact, in the past 3400 years of history, humans have only been at peace 8% of the time, much of that under the Roman Empire whose "peace" came at the cost of oppressive tyranny.

My point is maybe these aren't the prophetic part of what Jesus is saying...these are simply realities. These are not signs of the end, they are signs of what living looks like on Earth, and among people consumed with sin.

I think Jesus is acknowledging the fear and worry. There is a lot wrong with the world and he is merely naming some of it, which is something we are good at as well. We love the apocalyptic texts because they become our truth, our warning, that the end is near, and it won't be pretty, and change needs to happen NOW. We are very good at proclaiming the description of judgment...but we have gotten even better at ignoring the invitation and promise that Jesus is offering here.

Jesus begins by saying, "Do not be alarmed," and even though it sounds like he is saying some very alarming things, but this is where the prophetic part comes in. What

Jesus seems to be saying is, “Look, things are hard, and they may get harder...but they won’t stay there forever. God will overcome darkness, God will defeat evil, God’s peace will come again...that is the end...the other stuff is just what we endure while we are getting there.”

Jesus is about to live out this truth. He will be arrested, beaten, murdered upon the cross...it’s hard to imagine much worse things to endure...but we also know, resurrection is coming...new life is on the other side of the horrors about to be endured.

So, in the midst of these alarming things, Jesus says, “do not be alarmed. When we are alarmed, we do rash things. We let fear drive us to make bad decisions, to try to control outcomes and take matters into our own hands. We turn our trust from Jesus, because trusting Jesus takes patience and requires something of us...We he isn’t calling us to just sit back and do nothing while we wait - There is the work of proclaiming good news and comforting the troubled and embracing God’s love! But when we let fear take charge we turn our trust to others who promise us quick fixes and fake peace.

Jesus says, “Do not let the news of today get you off track. Do not let the difficulties cause you to surrender your faith and trust in God.” We know life can cause us to be fearful and anxious, we aren’t denying the difficulties and dangers of it...but we, as disciples of Christ, can’t just go around naming the trouble and instilling the fear, without also reminding the world that this isn’t the end...for the best is yet to come.

How do we do this? Jesus says, first, don’t be deceived – stay awake and look carefully at where...or in whom...you put your trust. Many who come in Jesus name, have nothing to do with Jesus and we better be able to tell the difference. Because some will come and lead us astray, convince us to give up our faith and join the status quo because we think there will be protection there. We must be discerning in making sure that the way we respond to the problems of the world are in keeping with the truth of Jesus Christ, not some watered down, distorted version that promises to make this path easier.

Jesus never promised easy...but he does promise a beautiful ending. War, famine, earthquakes...those are our reality...but we, children of God, have hope in God’s promise that the end is not destruction but renewal – a new heaven and earth... that the end is not war but peace - Not shaken and broken, but steady and strong - Not hungry and thirsty but filled and refreshed - Not the darkness of death but the light of everlasting life. The world offers us little, Christ offers us everything.

We are not to be consumed or controlled by fear...we are called to surrender it. Not surrender TO it, but to surrender IT. We are called to turn it over to God, trusting in the

ending we have been promised, and doing the work of enduring until we get there. Maybe we don't know what is on the other side of tomorrow. Maybe we don't know what trouble awaits us...but Jesus is reminding us that we don't need to be afraid to open that door, because he will be the one standing there, ready to lead us through it...ready to show us the way to the end...the glorious, beautiful, peace-filled, loving, gracious end.