SERMON NOTES — November 17, 2024

"Surviving the End of the World"

Mark 13 narrates what sounds like the end of the world. Because it does prophesy the end of their Jewish way of life centered on the Temple in Jerusalem. This is like prophesying the destruction of the Capitol building in Washington D.C. — which many called, after the insurrection of January 6, 2021, the "temple of our democracy."

Historical overview:

- Mark 13 narrates a conversation between Jesus and his disciples in around the year A.D. 33, in which Jesus prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.
- Mark wrote his Gospel in the year A.D. 70 (or shortly thereafter) when the Romans had just fulfilled that prophecy by destroying Jerusalem and the temple (at the end of Jewish-Roman War which had begun in A.D. 66)

This may have been an important reason why Mark chose to write the Gospel: to reveal Jesus as a true prophet. But first understand what being a true prophet is, as more than making true predictions. Prophecy isn't about locking people into certain fates. It's about offering choices, alternatives. Jesus prophesies that the end of their current path, the way of violent nationalism, is to be destroyed by the Romans.

Jesus, as also the true Messiah, offers them an alternative path, the way of God's reign. Jesus is there to lead them into a reign based on the power of love rather than violence, a reign in which we love our enemies rather than hate and fear them. Shockingly, it is a reign based on *suffering* violence rather than *inflicting* it, on choosing the way of *forgiveness* rather than of *retribution*.

Jesus was trying to show his people a different kind of God within their own stories and journey as a people. This God which the Hebrew prophets had begun to present to them is a God not so much of the powerful kings who champion nationalism but a God of widows and orphans, a God of the marginalized, who champions true justice for all. This God which the prophets represented is a God of equality and peace who wants all the people to come together as a family rather than to dwell in constant unrest along lines of inequality and division. This Messiah's God was, *is*, offering a new and better way that involves the healing of divisive inequalities such that the powerless become the focus of everyone's care. If anyone desires to be great and powerful, they must follow the way of loving service, the way of caring for all.

Here's the really Good News: Jesus was there not only model this prophetic reign of God but also to bring it about. It is *not* about the replacement on one religion by another, Judaism by so-called Christianity. It's about the launching of God's reign in the midst of continuing human reigns. And understanding how this launching comes about is particularly important, because so many of us have been taught in a tragically mistaken way. We've been wrongly taught that the cross and resurrection are about a wrathful god being appeased by Jesus's loving sacrifice on the cross. Well, that's the same logic as the sacrifice of the temples which God through the Jewish prophets had for centuries declared as passe, as something which human beings need to grow out of. The temples had in fact come to represent the way of nationalistic empires, sacrificing those at the margins of power to save those at the center of power. So, No!, the cross and resurrection represent something quite different — the opposite, really. The cross and resurrection represent a God of love, the power of life itself, offering us another reign, another way of governance. It's a reign that moves away from the strong man king or emperor who promises retribution against one's enemies for the small price of inequality and injustice, where the powerful reign over the powerless. Jesus comes to offer God's way of reigning, which foregoes the violent strongman altogether in favor of the king who *serves in love*, calling all people under this reign to caring for one another and for our earth home.

So, in light of these clear choices Jesus offered in the first century, I believe we made the wrong choice two weeks ago, choosing a path closer to nationalism than to the step forward our experiment with democracy imperfectly makes towards God's reign. We'll see.

As followers of Jesus the Messiah, our calling remains the same: namely, to live into God's reign, as best we can, in the path that he's forged for us. More on that next week. For now, we turn our attention to the Lord's Supper — where instead of killing something on an altar we remember the way of self-giving with which our Lord nourishes us and strengthens us for arduous journey to peace — the way of his body broken for us, his blood poured out for us. The way of New Creation. Let us eat and drink of that food, strengthened for whatever lies ahead.