

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 17 2024

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“The World is Coming to an End!”

Based on Mark 13:1-8

Hang on to your pews! The end of the world is coming! Or is it just the beginning?

As we near the end of the Church Year, and the worry over salvation and eternity creeps into scholarly theologian's thinking, we are met with some rather daunting passages of scriptures. Over the years these texts have been used to scare generations of good people into declaring their devotion for Christ...

- Not out of love for the Saviour and the yearning to live the kind of life that is full of hope and purpose
- But out of fear of eternity in the fires of hell.

Going to church in the Medieval Period must have been such an uplifting experience!

No doubt, this is a rather intimidating passage. But I never got the impression that Christ wanted to scare his listeners into become believers out of fear, but to

invite them into a new level of spiritual consciousness in relationship with Him, so that they might continue to live hopefully in the midst of a complicated and corrupted world. [Does that sound familiar these days?]

So maybe this passage is not about the end of days, but the beginning of them.

These are the beginning of birth pains. (v8)

There will be all sorts of trouble in the world, at home, across the seas;

- All sorts of things to point to and say, 'See, it's a sign of the end...'
- All sorts of people crying out that everything is lost...
- All sorts of things falling apart and falling down... But this will just be the beginning of something fresh and new.

It's important to notice that Jesus did not say that the temple, the place of worship, the revered spaces of the faith would be destroyed, only that they would be torn down. And to tear something down, means that something new or different will be built to replace that which was torn down.

- A new building replaces a worn out building with old plumbing and no insulation.
- A new organization is created with the best parts of older organizations that have become outdated or mothballed.
- A new believer moves into a better and brighter version of themselves, while existing in the same earthly body, and appearing outwardly, no different than before.

So here's the difficult question.

- Is our church being torn down, so that a new church can be built?
- Is the church that you and I understand, the traditions we grew up with, the particular way we like to worship and serve our community, is all this being torn down?

Yes.
Torn down, but not destroyed.

And the more difficult realization...
You and I either help this happen, or we get left at the side of the road while the church rebuilds itself to what it needs to be for the people who will come after us.

I told you to hang on to your pew.

Our churches are in trouble. Our denominations are in trouble. This is not new news to you.

We ask ourselves, "How can that be? I see it happening, but how can that be?" I've given my time and energy and money over the years, just like everyone else here and yet, everything we have built seems to be slipping slowly through our fingers. It's not right. It's not the way it supposed to be. And yet, here we are.

Why is God doing this to us? Well folks, God isn't doing this to us. We have done it to ourselves. And that's hard to hear. For all the good we have done over the years,

- To lift The Word to the world,
- To raise our children in the faith,
- To serve our communities with compassion,
- To be faithful witnesses...

We have also dedicated way too much of our time and energy over the generations, obsessing...

- About our buildings and all the rules about who can and who can't use it.
- About budgets being squeaky tight committee meetings.
- About bureaucracy of our denominations, polity, creating pecking orders and hierarchies about who is in

charge and who gets communion and who can be baptized and so forth.

None of this is what Christ wanted us to spend time and energy on. Yet, slowly over time, mostly without us even being aware, our faithfulness has lead us down some rabbit trails that have been anything but faithful. Now I want to be clear here, that I'm not pointing fingers at any particular person or our denomination. Just to say that the time we spend on buildings, budgets and bureaucracy of the life of the church far outweighs the time we spend on worship and witness to the world. And that is upside down to what Christ would have us do.

So there is a reset.
A tearing down.
A rebuilding.
A fresh start.

And that's what is happening now. A church for the next generation that will serve what they need when they get there. Now it doesn't mean that we are obsolete or don't have a place in the church anymore. It just means that it's going to be different. Even I can see that my style of leadership, my understanding of what it means to be in the pulpit is becoming dated. There will be a day that my particular way is not quite what the church needs anymore. And I have to ask myself, am I going to help the

process to rebuild, or am I going to get in the way?

There will always be a place for you and I in Christ's church. It is a promise our Saviour made to us, and one He keeps. But as the church around us is reshaping and rebuilding itself, we have to decide..

- Am I going to help the rebuilding process along?
- Am I going to try and keep an open mind to new things or newer ways of doing things?
- Am I going to look for evidence of the rebuilding, rather than be discouraged when something changes?
- Am I going to complain less about what is not, and encourage more about what is?
- Am I going to get out of the way, if I find myself in the way of?
- Am I going to trust that God is building something for all of us?

The world is not an easy place.

The church that used to be our bedrock seems to be falling before our eyes. But don't be alarmed. The church is going nowhere. This is only a renovation, with upgrades and new plumbing and better insulation.

The world will one day come to an end.

But not today.

Amen.