

Mark 13: 1-8
November 15, 2009
Rev. Robin Sherman

There have always been those among us who have claimed to know when the end times are coming. For some this is known as the “second coming” others call it the “rapture” and many times these people look to the Bible as a source for their predictions. The people who suggest these things are also known as “futurolgists”; not to be confused with “psychics or clairvoyants”, futurolgists are people who look at human history and human nature particularly in view of our warring tendencies and make observations about what might happen in the future.

One such person was the writer of the novel *Brave New World*, Aldus Huxley. His book was required reading when I went to high school. In the book he talks about babies in test tubes and the ability to tap into the genetic code or DNA of people to fix defects. This novel was written years before these things were close to being a reality. Today we expect technology to work magic for us. We have unravelled the mystery of DNA and create human life in Petri dishes as a common way to impregnate women. Nothing about this is shocking to us today. But in the 70’s when I was in high school it was scary to think of such things.

Futurolgists talked of the use of nuclear power and the tragedy of the atomic bomb as proof that the end was inevitable. Albert Einstein said, **“The unleashed power of the atomic bomb has changed everything, except our way of thinking. Because human beings have not changed, “this earth drifts towards unparalleled catastrophe.”** (taken from The End of the World, Rev. Markquat, The Text This Week)

Antiquity also had those that we today might call “futurolgists” but in their time they were referred to as “Seers”. They were different than the prophets of the Old Testament; they included Ezekiel, Daniel, and John (the one who is believed to have written Revelation). We refer to them not as “futurolgists” but as the “apocalyptic writers”. Having said that it is important for us to have some understanding of the word apocalypse. We flippantly refer to it as the end times or the end of the world, however the English translation of the word means off with the cover – Apo = off Calypse = with the cover. Some translate it as an “unveiling” or “looking behind the veil”.

Jesus, in Mark 13 and in the gospel parallels Matthew 24 and Luke 21, have sometimes been referred to as Jesus’ teaching of the end times. Jesus is taking off the cover and giving us a glimpse into the future. If anyone is to know about the future of human kind shouldn’t it be Jesus, the Heir of God, the offspring of God, the Son of God? Surely Jesus knows when the end will come. But perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Let’s step back for a moment. Jesus and four of his disciples have come out of the temple where Jesus taught everyday for a week before the crucifixion. One of them say to Jesus, **“Look at this temple; it’s beauty, it’s amazing stones.”** Jesus replies, **“See**

these great stones, not one of them will be left upon the other; all will be thrown down.”

Now none of us here today knows what that Temple looked like but here is what we know about it. The Temple began its 83 year building plan in 20 BCE (Before the common era). It was not completed until 63 or 64 CE (in the common era, or AD). It was destroyed in 70 CE. Now you do the math – Jesus was said to have been crucified somewhere around 33 CE, which means the temple was not completed yet when Jesus and the disciples walked out and marvelled at its majesty. It was a huge undertaking. It was said to have taken 100,000 builders over the years to complete it. The Temple was 70 feet high; some of the stones were 12 to 60 feet in length, 7.5 feet in height and 9 feet in width. Today the “Wailing Wall” is all that remains.

Now, back to Jesus and the disciples sitting across from the great structure on the Mount of Olives where they slept during that last week of Jesus’ life. After Jesus has said the Temple will not last the disciples ask, “When will this be?” “What are the signs? What’s going to happen?” Jesus warns them that many will come claiming to be the Messiah; false profits will appear trying to lead people astray; earthquakes and wars and famine will happen. But then he says something odd. He says:

“Yet this is only the beginning of the labour pains.” What? The beginning of birth, but aren’t we talking about the end? This part Jesus’ words are mostly ignored by those who predict the end of the world. They get too caught up in the bits before this line. The earthquakes and wars bits that for sure mean the end of the world.

The end of the world has been predicted by many men throughout time. In Luther’s time it was a man named Melchior Hoffman, a lay preacher noted for his zealous thoughts that the world would end in his lifetime and gave the date as 1533. But the world did not end. Hans Nut claimed to be a prophet sent by Christ predicting the end to come in 1531. Luther himself suggested that God could not suffer the world much longer suggesting the end would come within 300 years.

Every millennia brought with it predictions of the end. Whenever great change takes place our human nature leads us to assume this must be the end. The Reformation, the Enlightenment, The Renaissance, the Peasants’ War all contained voices of apocalyptic doom and speculation.

Today’s voice of apocalyptic doom is that of Tim LeHaye who wrote the Left Behind Series that suggests that the end of the world started with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Our TV’s show us some of today’s futurologists (although I don’t think they would call themselves that), giving clues by matching headlines with scripture but you can be prepared if only you read this book or send for this kit for only two instalments of \$29.99. But think about this for a moment. If Jesus didn’t know when the time would come, If Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul didn’t know it why in the world should we believe Tim LeHaye or Jack Van Impey know.

Jesus told us the end will come in a flash, before we even know it, before we can even react. The end of our world as we know it comes at our death. And it is always a surprise. Even when we think we are prepared; even when we have done our homework, gone to church, prayed every day, read our Bible; death will come as a surprise. Here one day gone the next...regardless of the **way** it happens. No one knows when the end will come; their end, the end of the world as they know it. Through illness, accident, heart attack, stroke, gunshot, knife, during surgery or while crossing the street. We do not know the time or the day Jesus told us, it will come like a thief in the night, and aren't you glad you don't know? What if you did know? O sure doctors can sometimes give us an estimate regarding illness as to how long we will live but does knowing that change your life as it is today?

If today was your last day what would you do? A popular song right now asks this very question. The group Nickelback sings this song:

If Today Was Your Last Day

Songwriters: Kroeger, Chad;

My best friend gave me the best advice
He said each day's a gift and not a given
right
Leave no stone unturned, leave your fears
behind
And try to take the path less traveled by
That first step you take is the longest stride

If today was your last day and tomorrow
was too late
Could you say goodbye to yesterday?
Would you live each moment like your last
Leave old pictures in the past?
Donate every dime you had, if today was
your last day?
What if, what if, if today was your last day?

Against the grain should be a way of life
What's worth the price is always worth the
fight
Every second counts 'cause there's no
second try
So live like you're never living twice
Don't take the free ride in your own life

If today was your last day and tomorrow
was too late
Could you say goodbye to yesterday?
Would you live each moment like your last?

Leave old pictures in the past?
Donate every dime you had?

And would you call those friends you never
see?
Reminisce old memories?
Would you forgive your enemies?
And would you find that one you're
dreaming of?
Swear up and down to God above
That you'd finally fall in love if today was
your last day?

If today was your last day
Would you make your mark by mending a
broken heart?
You know it's never too late to shoot for the
stars
Regardless of who you are

So do whatever it takes
'Cause you can't rewind a moment in this
life
Let nothing stand in your way
'Cause the hands of time are never on your
side

© ARM YOUR DILLO PUBLISHING INC;
WARNER-TAMERLANE PUBLISHING
CORP;

As for war, famine, natural disasters of course they will happen; they have been happening since the beginning of time and the more we add to our population and destroy the balance of our eco-systems the worse it will get. But is it a master plan of God to destroy us in one fell swoop? Not according to Jesus and not according to God if you believe in the promise made to Noah, that never again will God destroy all of creation.

Yes Life as we know it will end. Buildings like the Temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed. Futurologists will continue to make predictions of the earth's end while those of us who believe that God's love is eternal, and never ending will live on this earth and work toward that place of love and peace that Jesus told us about; that heaven on earth that God wants us to work toward not out of fear of the end but rather in the abundance and anticipation of new birth.

This is only the beginning of the labour pains. A Brave New World awaits.

Thanks be to God.
Amen