

Children

Object: coin bank and some coins

Good morning, boys and girls. Can you tell me what this is? That's right, it's a coin bank. And what do you do with a coin bank? You put your pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters in it, don't you? That's how we save up money. We store up all our spare change in these coin banks, so that when we see something we really need to buy, we'll have the money all saved up. We just keep saving the coins, saving the coins, filling up the coin bank until that special day when we take the coins out and use them for something.

You know, sometimes we treat Thanksgiving like a coin bank. We save up all our "thank yous" all year until Thanksgiving, and then we tell God "Thank You" for all the wonderful things He's done for us. We have all these things to be thankful for loving family and friends, food to eat, fun things like kickball and puppy dogs. What are you thankful for? (Allow the children to name some things) Those are all good things. We have a million things to be thankful for! But we forget to tell God "Thank You" every day. Instead, we save up all our "thank yous" until this one day a year, Thanksgiving, and then we tell Him. Let's remember not to save up our "thank yous" until Thanksgiving, but to say "Thank You" to God every day.

Today's readings are full of gloom and doom. The first reading from the *Book of Daniel* talks about the end of time being a time of unsurpassed stress where some who die shall be in everlasting horror and disgrace. The Gospel reading from the Apocalyptical sections of *Mark* presents the end of time as being the day of tribulations, when the earth will shake and even the stars will fall out of the sky. Scary stuff, these end of the world readings.

But are they? Look again at that first reading: *Daniel* prophesies that many will live forever. The wise will shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament and those who lead the many to justice will be like the stars forever. And in *Mark* Jesus adds, "the elect will be gathered from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky."

The early Christians did not look at the Second Coming and end of time with terror. Instead they saw it as a time when the Lord would return to his people and correct the injustices of the world. Good people, Christians, were being put to death for the Lord in the most horrible ways. Throughout the world, little children were starving to death while rich people ate heartily. The conquering Romans, like the Greeks and Persians before them, had no respect for any life other than their own and killed the population of whole cities, men, women and children viciously and randomly. This is not what God created the world to be. The world was suffering from sin. Therefore, the Christians prayed, "Come, Lord Jesus, Maranatha. Come and recreate your world into your image."

The world has not changed all that much in its barbarity. People are still killed for whom they are. We are still receiving accounts of genocide throughout the world. Here, in our country, good people are still persecuted when they refuse to join the latest mores of society. To become a federal judge in this country, a person has to be in favor of gay marriage and abortion, among the other darling positions of the extreme liberals. Anyone who is not is held up to scorn. On the other side of the spectrum, anyone who says that the way of war should not be the way of the most civilized, advanced country of the world, then has to be prepared to be labeled as not being patriotic, even treasonous. The world has not changed that much. People who hold their convictions tightly to themselves are still persecuted, even put to death.

And children are still hungry, still starving to death in Africa, South America, and, really, throughout the world.

The world has not changed all that much. And yet, it has. The major change in the world is that with Jesus Christ there is hope. There is hope that war will not have the last word. There is hope that starvation will become a bad memory. There is hope that racism and sexism will not in the end dance a jig together. There is hope that oppression will not have a lasting foothold over the vulnerable. There is hope that those who do evil will not prevail.

Evil is not part of God's plan. But we are part of that plan. The visions we heard today rely on us to take a role in the conquest of the Kingdom. We are assured that if we take up the battle of good against evil, good will prevail and we will join in the triumph of God's forces.

Listen to the "then" section of the Gospel. "Then you will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory." That's the Good News, the Gospel. We will see triumph of goodness and be present as the Lord gathers his own to himself.

Believing in the Lord and hoping in this promise, we turn our attention to the work at hand: preaching the Gospel through our words and deeds, even to those in darkness. Even when we feel ourselves engulfed by darkness. Still, we proclaim the Gospel, for we believe that light is coming. We do not know when. We do not know where. But we do know the He, the Lord of Light is coming. And so we continue to pray in the prayer He taught us, "Thy Kingdom Come."

II

If you are a big sports fan then you know how frustrating it is when your favorite team is playing in a different time zone. You can't watch the game on live TV because it either takes place during your workday, or way past your bedtime.

A pastor in Hawaii shares how he deals with this issue. Depending on where you live in the continental U.S., Hawaii is three to six hours behind. If it's 10 p.m. in New York, the time is 5 p.m. in Hawaii. Because of this time difference, the Monday Night Football game is played in the mid-afternoon, according to Hawaii Time. The local TV stations delay their telecast until the evening. The pastor in Hawaii says he's too excited to wait for the television broadcast, so he listens to the game live on radio. Then that evening, he watches the time-delayed broadcast on TV. He says, "If I know my team has won the game, it influences how I watch it on TV. If my team fumbles the ball or throws an interception, it's not a big deal. I think, 'that's bad, but everything's under control. I know how it all ends—we win!'" (1)

If you're a big sports fan, his plan makes perfect sense. It's a great feeling to know that no matter how bad the game may look in the moment, your team is going to turn it around and win. You can rise above the stress and tension of the moment if you know how the game ends.

When the pandemic came, workers were divided into the essential workers and the non-essential workers. Although being essential might sound more important, these workers were usually the folks who do the everyday jobs that keep things moving—bus drivers, supermarkets, electricians, food workers. The non-essential workers were in another category.

There were two wonderful things about being a non-essential worker who could work from home. First, one could stay in one's pajamas or leisure clothes most of the day unless there was some electronic meeting happening. The other was that the boss seemed pretty distant. We didn't have to worry about her eyes on our backs or how he might stir things up by calling folks into his office.

The readings today make me wonder what kind of boss we think Jesus is. Because in every one of the scripture selections God seems to be far away. And just as an absent boss might allow for mayhem in the office, an absent God might allow for lots of complications in the lives of Christians. On this view, the shape of Christian life is this: when Jesus comes back, all bets are off, and he's going to clean house.

In the first reading, it's Michael the Archangel who is going to take care of the boss's business. In the second reading, Jesus the priest waits until his enemies are made his footstool. And in the Gospel, the Son of Man comes with his angels who gather the chosen of God from the four corners of the earth.

The problem with this picture is that it makes it seem like, during all the time we live, Christ is not with us and we are not with Christ. The cat's away and we, the mice, will play our games. Jesus is on the side, watching, waiting, until the alarm bell rings, or the horn is sounded. Jesus certainly left us with a lot of responsibility, but that doesn't mean he has left us.

There is an optical illusion when we think about the future, especially what we imagine will be the end of the world. It makes all the intervening time look tentative, relative, unimportant. We know what happens when people buy up lots of property to develop a project but then let the

occupants stay there: everything runs down. They are only thinking of the day when those houses will come down.

But Christ's future coming is an extension of Christ's ongoing presence with us now. The one who sends the angels is the one who tells us he is with us until the end of time. The one who comes in judgment is the one who is here for us as our food and drink in the Sacrament. The one who reads our hearts is the one who sends his Spirit into us to guide our every step.

Our judgement is not what we did when we thought Christ wasn't here. Our judgment is whether we let Christ walk alongside of us, as the guide of our lives, and the inner strength of our hearts, as the one whose Spirit transforms us. Judgement is not about how we played around when we thought Jesus wasn't coming. No, it's when we push Jesus away when he wants to embrace us. Our judgement is simply this: what kind of disciples have we let Jesus make us as we walked alongside him. The greater our discipleship, the greater is the joy of eternal life; the smaller our following of Jesus, the smaller our eternal joy.

Some of us are shirt and tie kinds of people; some of us prefer leisure clothes. Some of us like dressing up; some of us hate that. But whatever style we have, Jesus is by our side, asking to be part of our lives so we can serve his Kingdom. The most important thing is saying yes as the Spirit works in us. Then we don't have to worry about the end of the world because Jesus will complete the job in and through the grace he gives us now.

III

Our lesson from Mark's Gospel is part of the apocalyptic literature of the Bible. In very vivid terms it describes the last days of planet earth. Some people get a chill just thinking of the possibility of the end of the world or the Rapture or the Second Coming. Each time predictions are made there are people who sell their homes, cash in their life insurance policies, turn toward the heavens for signs. Of course, none of this is new.

Historians believe that the first apocalyptic cult in the U.S. was established in 1694, when a Transylvanian mystic named Johannes Kelpius and his followers settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There were 40 so-called "monks" in Kelpius' cult because they believed the number 40 had a spiritual meaning. They believed that the End Times were coming soon. So they lived in a small settlement in the wilderness where they studied astronomy, and made art and music. At least this was a peaceful way to wait for the Second Coming of Jesus.

Kelpius predicted that the End Times would occur on the last day of 1694. However, his followers didn't abandon him when his prediction didn't come true. Instead, they lived in the woods and continued to study the stars. After Johannes Kelpius' death, his followers disbanded and went on with their lives. By the way, Kelpius was the subject of the first known oil painting in the U.S. It was painted by one of Kelpius' followers, Christopher Witt. (2) Of course, there are still groups around that espouse a belief that the end times are imminent.

There is a white supremacist group called the Christian Identity movement. Some people consider it sick, tragic and twisted that they would use the name "Christian" to identify their hate-filled beliefs. They believe the best way to prepare for the end times is to stock up on guns and ammunition so they can protect themselves from unbelievers and do battle with "the great beast of Revelation" at the end of time. (3)

There is nothing in the Bible, or in the history of Christian tradition, that would support this view. Nothing. Yet there are many passages in the Bible that tell us we should prepare for the end of time. So how should we do it?

We do not want to be guilty of clock-watching this morning, but we want to take seriously Christ's words about the last days. There are three significant things Christ says to us about the end of time and Christ's return.

First of all, he says we cannot know the future. That's vitally important for us to realize that lest we be led astray. We cannot know the future. Jesus' disciples fully expected his return in their lifetime. They were wrong. No scriptural truth is more sure than this one: Only God knows the future.

A woman named Leta Davis tells of sitting in church with her family listening to her pastor preach on the end of time. She didn't know her three-year-old son, Christopher,

was paying attention to the sermon also until the pastor asked the congregation, “What preparation do we need for the final crisis?”

And little Christopher whispered loudly, “Preparation H.” (4)

Christopher sounds like a smart kid, but we need something more than Preparation H to face the uncertainty of an unknown future.

Anytime society faces a major change or crisis—a pandemic, rising unemployment, natural disasters—people search for some sense of control. We either seek someone to blame or someone to guide us. Just look at the myths, lies and conspiracy theories that circulate on social media. We gain a sense of control when we find someone to blame for our problems.

A mother asked her son what he would like for his birthday.

“I’d like a little brother,” he said.

“Oh my, that’s such a big wish,” the mother said. “Why do you want a little brother?”

“Well,” said the boy, “there’s only so much I can blame on my dog.” (5)

When we fear the future, we look for someone or something to blame.

Another way of dealing with an uncertain future is by looking for someone or something to guide us. To provide us with a sense of comfort or certainty. We turn to anyone who offers us answers—political leaders, religious leaders, influencers, celebrities, even psychics.

A woman named Hae Jun Jeon serves as a psychic advisor to major financial and technology firms in New York City. She advises her clients on major decisions and investments based on their tarot card readings. (6)

Don’t you wonder how many millions of dollars’ of business decisions and investments could be based on this woman’s advice? I hope her clients get their money’s worth. Reading about her work reminds me of an interview someone did with a New York City detective. She said, “I’ve gone into hundreds of [fortune-teller’s parlors], and have been told thousands of things, but nobody ever told me I was a policewoman getting ready to arrest her.” (7) Some things psychics don’t foresee.

Jesus does not promise us any answers about the future. In fact, he says to watch out for those people who claim to know the future because they are deceiving us. We cannot know the future. Only God knows.

Secondly, since we cannot know the future, our task is to make the most of the present. Are you making the most of the days God has given you? Are you using your energy, time and talents to make this world a better place? Are you finding

opportunities to do good deeds and share God's love with others? In your community, are you doing the work of Jesus in preparation for the day when he *does* return?

I love what British missionary Jackie Pullinger says about making the best use of this life. At the age of 22, Jackie believed God was calling her to be a missionary. On the advice of a mentor, Jackie packed one bag and a £10 note and boarded a boat headed for China. Along the way, she prayed for God to send her wherever He could use her. When the boat arrived at the infamous drug- and crime-infested slum known as the Walled City of Kowloon in Hong Kong, Jackie heard God telling her that this was her new home.

Alone, with no mission society or church supporting her, Jackie walked the dangerous streets of Kowloon every day and shared the message of Jesus with drug addicts, gang members and prostitutes. Over the years, she has brought thousands of people to Christ, and has established numerous rehabilitation centers for addicts and prostitutes.

In an interview, the editor of a Christian magazine in the UK asked Jackie if she thought the British Church was sending out enough missionaries.

Jackie said her biggest concern is that the Bible tells us that we are all supposed to be missionaries. Jesus left us behind to do his work. Yet most of us miss the point of life completely by living only for ourselves. Jackie said, “. . . this is a very short life. And eternal life is forever. We're going to feel stupid for eternity if we wasted this one.” (8)

We're going to feel stupid for eternity if we waste this life. That's a long time to feel stupid. But she has a point. Each of us has been given a finite amount of time and energy, and a nearly infinite number of choices for how we use that time and energy. We can't control the future, but we can control how we use this present moment. You were created in the image of a loving and all-powerful God. Are your choices and actions in the present reflecting the character and purposes of God?

God does not give us all the answers about the future. God does give us an incredible opportunity to follow His will in this present moment.

This brings us to the final and most important truth: God does know the future. None of us knows, but God does. This is our chief source of comfort and strength. God knows.

Professor and author Elie Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. He is best known for his book *Night*, a memoir of his family's suffering in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. Elie was just fifteen years old when his family was deported from Romania to Auschwitz. His mother, father and younger sister were murdered in the camps.

You would think that suffering a tragedy this great would make him deeply pessimistic about the future. Instead, Elie Wiesel encouraged people to live with courage and

hope, to choose their attitude toward the future. In one of his works, he writes, “One must wager on the future. To save the life of a single child, no effort is superfluous. To make a tired old man smile is to perform an essential task. To defeat injustice and misfortune, if only for one instant, for a single victim, is to invent a new reason to hope.” (9)

Realizing that God knows the future gives us a new reason to hope. If we know God’s character, then we trust God’s purposes. In spite of uncertainty, in spite of suffering, in spite of circumstances, we can trust the future to God and give our best to the present moment. Rather than wallowing in speculation or fear, we can focus on doing good works and sharing God’s love right now in our present circumstances. And in this way, we can invent new reasons to hope.

The biblical testimony is that there is a basic pattern to all of life. You and I can’t discern it any more than a fish can analyze the water in which it swims. If we could step out of space and time with God, we could see the pattern, and we could see that all things do work to the good for those who love God, but right now we see through a glass darkly. All we know is that God knows and therefore things are all right.

In 1941, while confined as a prisoner of war in Germany, a young Frenchman and “devout Christian” named Olivier Messiaen composed an instrumental piece titled, “The Quartet for the End of Time.” It is based on a passage from Revelation 10. This beautiful piece of music was written to remind the prisoners that no matter how horrible their circumstances looked, at the end of time God would win out over the forces of evil and redeem humanity’s brokenness and suffering.

The timing of the song is complex, and requires the musicians to pay close attention to one another. In most musical scores, there are notations to play a certain section slowly or quickly. Messiaen cared more that his musicians play this song with great emotion. Instead of using notations to drive the pace of the music, his notations read, “Play tenderly, play with ecstasy, play with love.” (10)

Even if we don’t know the future, we don’t have to live in fear. Like the beautiful quartet written in a prisoner-of-war camp, we can live tenderly, live with ecstasy, live with love. We only have to trust His promise that God knows the future, and our time is safe in his hands.

1. Heide, Volker. *Christ is the Center: Sermons of Mercy in Christ* (p. 81). King of Kings Publishing, Madison, Connecticut. Kindle Edition.

2. Cave of Kelpius <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/cave-of-kelpius>.

3. “Dark Prophecies” by Jeffrey L. Sheler, *Mysteries of the Faith* (U.S. News and World Report special issue) p. 73.

4 Leta Davis in *Wit & Wisdom*.

5. From Pastor Tim's CleanLaugh List, <http://www.cybersalt.org/cleanlaugh>.
6. "Meet the psychic that big-money Wall Street traders depend on" by Melkorka Licea, *New York Post* August 8, 2020. <https://nypost.com/2020/08/08/meet-the-psychic-that-big-money-wall-street-traders-depend-on/>.
7. Quotes of the Day, <http://www.quotationspage.com/qotd.html>.
8. Sam Hailes is editor of *Premier* magazine, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2019/January-2019/Jackie-Pullinger-We-re-going-to-feel-stupid-for-eternity-if-we-waste-this-life>.
9. Elie Wiesel, Nobel Laureate, writer. Received from: DailyInbox Presents.
10. Rev. Dr. Thomas G. Long, http://day1.org/3823-the_start_of_the_trail.

IV

A priest and a rabbi from local parishes were standing by the side of the road holding up signs. The rabbi's sign read, "The End is Near!"

The priest, on the other side of the road, held up a sign which read, "Turn before it's too late!" They planned to hold up their signs to each passing car.

"Get a job," The first driver yelled at them when he saw the sign.

The second driver, immediately behind the first, yelled, "Leave us alone you religious freaks!"

Shortly, from around the curve, the two clergy heard screeching tires and a splash followed by more screeching tires and another splash. The rabbi looked over at the priest and said, "Do you think we should try a different sign?"

The priest responded thoughtfully, "Perhaps our signs ought to say simply 'Bridge Out.'"

Keep that little piece of humor in mind about that sign, "The End is Near!" as I deal with a rather somber topic: "When The Unthinkable Happens."

Just yesterday over 150 people were killed, more than 80 are in critical condition and another 100 injured physically and untold thousands injured mentally in Parish by the madness of around 8 terrorists. New York and Boston are on alert. The terrorists have support from people in Germany so the Germans are worried about another attack in their country. The French are calling it their 9/11.

Let's consider another unthinkable event. On the morning of August 28, 2005, the National Weather Service issued this ominous alert, "Devastating Damage Expected."

Hurricane Katrina had morphed from a relatively weak Category 1 hurricane to a Category 5 tropical monster--and was spiraling straight toward New Orleans. The city would be "uninhabitable for weeks . . . perhaps longer," the weather service warned. Half the houses would lose their roofs. Commercial buildings would be unusable, and apartment buildings would be destroyed. Residents should expect long-term power outages and water shortages that would "make human suffering incredible by modern standards." The prediction was right on target as was the hurricane.

Many of us have etched in our brains a picture of the Louisiana Superdome where 20,000 people sought refuge from Katrina. Conditions inside the dome were insufferable due to heat and humidity. There were reports of crimes within the dome as well. At the nearby New Orleans Convention Center, where another 30,000 people had fled, reporters interviewed people who had waded through "chin high" water, and who told of friends and families vanishing in the flood. Hurricane Katrina affected 90,000 square miles in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Well over 1300 people were killed across the region, and bodies were still turning up in condemned homes eight months later. (2) Again, such destruction was unthinkable . . . until it happened.

Tuesday, September 11, 2001. Nineteen members of the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda hijacked four passenger airliners so they could be flown into buildings in suicide attacks. Two of those planes were crashed into the North and South towers of the World Trade Center complex in New York

City. Within two hours, both 110-story towers collapsed. A third plane was crashed into the Pentagon, leading to a partial collapse in its western side. The fourth plane crashed into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after its passengers tried to overcome the hijackers. In total, 2,996 people died in the attacks, including the 227 civilians and 19 hijackers aboard the four planes. It was the deadliest incident for firefighters and for law enforcement officers in the history of the United States, with 343 firefighters and 72 law enforcement officers killed while doing their duty. (3) Unthinkable, but it happened.

There are many unthinkable events recorded in history. There are some recorded in the Bible. One of them is recorded in today's lesson from Mark's Gospel.

The reading of the Gospel is the end of Mark's chapter 13, but we need to look at the beginning to see the full context. As Jesus was leaving the temple at Jerusalem, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

And they were magnificent buildings. The historian Josephus said that much of the exterior of the temple at Jerusalem, which was constructed under Herod the Great, was covered with gold that reflected the fiery rays of the sun. Moreover, he said that, from a distance, the temple appeared like a mountain covered with snow. This was probably because those parts that were not covered with gold were made of white stone.

And the temple was enormous. The outer court was nearly a quarter of a mile long and three football fields across. It was bordered by walls. On top of those walls were magnificent, covered cloisters or walkways, with richly carved wooden ceilings.

The temple was a huge undertaking which required an enormous amount of labor and money. It was said to be larger and more beautiful than the temple that Solomon built. It was quite a sight for all to behold--an architectural wonder of the ancient world.

As the disciples stared with wonder at this magnificent edifice, Jesus brought them back to earth as he said, "Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

What was he saying--that their precious temple would be destroyed? That was unthinkable to the disciples. The temple represented God. The temple represented their identity as God's people. Yet Jesus told them that one day it would lie in ruins. And what he predicted came true, within the lifetime of some of them. Herod's temple, a magnificent structure of awesome proportions, four years after its completion was totally destroyed and wiped from the face of the earth. (4) That was in 70 A.D., approximately 40 years after Christ's death.

In our lesson for today Jesus addresses the forthcoming destruction of the temple and then uses this opportunity to talk with his disciples about the end of time. This is the content of Mark 13, one of the so-called apocalyptic chapters in the Bible, a chapter that has been used to strike fear in many

hearts. The end of time is still a subject of speculation in many Christian churches, and many pastors and teachers are still using it to keep their fearful congregations in line.

I don't mean to offend any of you by wading into this controversial topic, but I believe it is my responsibility to deal with some of the misinformation that has been spread about what is often referred to as "the end times." Jesus said three things about the end times that could be helpful to us.

The first concerns false teachers. Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many . . ."

I don't think we can properly deal with a writing like Mark 13 without dealing with the subject of false teachers. There is a popular misconception that has been spread in recent times about the end of life on earth known as "The Rapture."

As Marcus Borg points out in his book *Speaking Christian*, most Christians throughout history never heard of the rapture . . . and with good reason. The word and the notion it embodies are a modern innovation, going back less than two centuries. Nobody even thought of the rapture until the 1800s. "Because millions of Christians think that the rapture is 'biblical teaching' and thus has the authority of the Bible behind it, it is important to know that it is neither biblical nor ancient," says Borg, "but was first proclaimed by a British evangelist named John Nelson Darby" in the first half of the 19th century.

Darby concocted his vision of the rapture by his interpretation of a few passages in the Bible that speak about the second coming of Jesus and the end of the world. According to Darby's imaginative scenario, the rapture begins a series of events that will unfold seven years before the second coming of Jesus and the final judgment. More specifically, it refers to an event when true Christians, as he would term them, will be raptured, that is, taken up to heaven, before Jesus' coming. Those who are raptured will be spared the "tribulation"--the horrific suffering, wars, and devastation that face those who are "left behind."

As you have probably guessed the rapture is the premise of a series of novels appropriately titled "Left Behind" by authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. These novels have sold more than sixty million copies since they began to be published in the mid-1990s. Obviously these books have made their authors quite wealthy. All twelve in the original series have been on the New York *Times* bestselling fiction list.

Before the "Left Behind" series, there was *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a best-selling book by Hal Lindsey describing the same scenario. (5)

These books and the movies that have been based on them have had a disturbing influence on many Christians. For one thing, they have convinced as many as 40 percent of American Christians that the second coming will happen quite soon. And they have stirred up much fear among many impressionable readers. Those who espouse such concerns seem to confuse fear with faith. Arousing fear in people can be both quite easy and quite profitable--as many cable news channels have learned.

That's quite different than the faith that Jesus instills in his followers. In fact, the constant admonition of Jesus is, "Don't be afraid." But that's the first thing Jesus warns us about in Mark 13- being led astray by false teachers.

The second thing Jesus warned his disciples against was misinterpreting contemporary events such as wars and natural disasters as indicators that the end is at hand.

He says, "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come . . ."

There have always been natural disasters and there will always be such disasters. Fortunately, particularly in this country, we are better protected against such disasters than any generation that's ever lived. We have never experienced disasters in the scope of those experienced by other nations and other generations.

For example, on July 5, 1201 in Egypt and Syria, the deadliest earthquake in recorded history struck. This disaster rocked the eastern Mediterranean and killed over 1.1 million people. Nearly every city in the near east felt the effects of this quake.

Then there was the bubonic plague or "Black Death." It killed almost 33 percent of the entire population of Europe when it struck between 1347 and 1350. It also affected millions in Asia and North Africa. (6)

There have even been flu epidemics through the centuries that have killed millions of persons. Each time a great tragedy has occurred, people have thrown up their hands and said, "This is it! This is the end of the world." But each time they've been wrong. Jesus warned his disciples against misinterpreting contemporary events such as wars and natural disasters as indicators that the end is at hand. Don't panic, friends. This world may be around for many more centuries or even millennia.

But here's the most important thing you need to know. Jesus made it very clear that nobody knows when the end of time will be. Jesus said even he didn't know. We read in verse 32 of Mark, "But about that day or hour **no one knows**, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." It might be tomorrow. It might be 10,000 years from now. Nobody knows! Foolish people keep setting dates, but so far they've been totally wrong. If you run into somebody determined to announce how soon the end will come, ask him if he thinks he is smarter than Jesus, for Jesus

said **even he** didn't know when it would be. How much more definitive can you be than that? In a classic *Peanuts* cartoon Linus and Lucy are standing at a window watching it rain. Lucy says to

Linus, "Look at it rain! What if the whole earth floods?"

Linus answers: "It won't! God promised Noah in Genesis Chapter 9 He would never flood the world again; the sign of this promise is the rainbow."

Lucy smiles and replies, "Linus, you've taken a great load off my mind." To which Linus responds, "Sound theology has a way of doing that." (7)

Jesus makes it very clear: regardless of what certain popular books and movies infer, it might be thousands or even millions of years before the end comes. Nobody knows--neither scientists, theologians nor quack preachers on radio or television.

Here's what I want you to remember: Life is unpredictable. Terrible things will always happen in this world. I don't say that to you so that you will be afraid. Exactly the opposite is true. I want you to know that regardless of what comes, God will never leave you nor forsake you. Even if the entire world should pass away, God will still be with you.

It is said that during the making of the classic film *Ben Hur*, actor Charlton Heston had to learn how to drive a chariot. It was part of a race scene that was probably the most exciting one that had ever been filmed up to that time.

After many weeks of chariot lessons Heston told the director, "I think I can drive the chariot all right but I'm not at all sure I can actually win the race."

The director, responded, "You just stay in the race and I'll make sure you win."

That's Christ message to us in every troubled time: "You just stay in the race and I'll make sure you win." Don't let false teachers fill your mind with needless anxiety. No one knows what the future holds, but we know Who holds the future. God holds the future and we are God's own children. Do not be afraid.

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