

The End is Near?

Questions of Faith: Part 2 “The End is Near?”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – February 6, 2022

5th Sunday After Epiphany

Readings: Daniel 12:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Mark 13:32-37

Reflection: Psalm 93

Greeting: The Lord by wisdom founded the earth. By understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the deeps broke open. And the clouds drop down the dew. Praise the Lord! (*Proverbs 3*)

Prayer: Lord, we turn to you this day that we may seek your wisdom. We know that all knowledge begins with you. Help us to walk in your ways and to follow the example set for us in Jesus Christ our redeemer. Bring us into your light so that we may live in your great love. Renew our spirit so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Strengthen our faith and our hope in your steadfast love and faithfulness, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 93

The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved; your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the LORD! Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore. (Psalm 93 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 93 and hear of God’s eternal reign. That God rules over all creation forever. Do you see God in the world that surrounds you? Do you feel the presence of the Lord wherever you go? How does that change the way that you live your life? How does it change the way that you treat others? Do you experience God’s creation as an act of love? What does it mean to you to seek God’s salvation?

Prayer: O Heavenly Father, you have watched over us all the days of our lives. Be with us now as we come to you with our worries and questions. Help us to find wisdom through your steadfast love. Help us to have faith that you are always with us. We thank you that your ear is always turned towards us so that we may come to you with the joys and troubles in our hearts. We raise our prayers to you because of your steadfast love and faithfulness. We seek your grace and love through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Daniel chapter 12 verses 5 through 9.

Then I, Daniel, looked, and two others appeared, one standing on this bank of the stream and one on the other. One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was upstream, "How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?" The man clothed in linen, who was upstream, raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven. And I heard him swear by the one who lives forever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished. I heard but could not understand; so I said, "My lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end. (Daniel 12:5-9 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 13 through 18.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Mark chapter 13 verses 32 through 37.

"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake." (Mark 13:32-37 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Our message for today is based on a question that I have dealt with numerous times. And it's one that's really difficult. A part of the difficulty is that when we start talking about the end times, we start getting into what is in essence a guessing game. And the reason I say that is because people have been trying to pin down "when" for pretty much as long as people have thought there would be an end. And every year somebody is making a prediction about when the end will come. There are entire churches based on being in the end of days. And so,

I picked the readings for today, not because they are the only ones but because they help to highlight a few points that I wanted to make. We start with our reading from Paul's letter to Thessalonica. First Thessalonians has Paul talking about when the end will come. And it is easy to miss what Paul is saying here because of the fact that he's saying a lot. Even though Paul is trying to help address fears about what happens when we die, something else comes through that I wanted to highlight here. It's that when Paul talks about Christ coming and the end times, Paul talks about it as something that will happen in his lifetime. And part of what tells us this, aside from the overall thrust of all of Paul's letters, it's that when Paul talks about what will happen, he talks about "we who are alive." We could overlook that and think of it as a general "those", but we would miss something important in what Paul believed. And part of that is that Paul believed everything would happen in his own lifetime. That he would see it. And it weighed on him later when he started to think that maybe he wouldn't see it in his lifetime. And his views begin to change. One of the reasons I highlight this is because it lets us say something that sometimes we're afraid to be able to say. And for me, it's that Paul was wrong. Does that invalidate everything Paul ever said? No. Because it turns out being wrong about one thing doesn't invalidate everything you ever had to say. And that's the other reason it's important to be able to look at this and say Paul was wrong. It didn't happen in his lifetime. It didn't happen within 100 years of his lifetime. But since Paul's day people have been predicting over and over again, trying to say "we know these are the signs, this is what's coming. The end is near." So far none of them have been right.

So, the question may arise again. Well then when is the end coming? We can look to our reading from Daniel for some help. Daniel is in the midst of trying to figure out all of these wonders at the end of the age and wants to know how long it'll be until the end. And Daniel hears but can't understand and he's told go on your way, it's a secret until the time of the end. In other words, sorry Daniel, you don't get to know. Now, a lot of effort has gone into figuring out what "a time two times and half the time" means. There are entire theological constructs based on guessing about that. And I say guessing because it is guessing, because even our reading today says sorry, you don't get to know. And I picked Daniel because of the fact that it shows us that the idea of the end goes back further than just what we often think of in Revelation. And it goes back into the Old Testament. The problem with both Daniel's vision and the Revelation to John is that the symbolism can be interpreted in about 1000 different ways. And it has been interpreted in all those different ways and continues to find new interpretations today. I have seen people write up long papers about how the end is coming. Some years ago, I remember being in a Bible study and we had a mailing that had come out that showed how the President was the Antichrist and the end was coming in just a couple of years. Guess what? It didn't. We can go back and find time after time after time that somebody has put everything together, meticulously plotted out exactly when the end is coming, and been wrong.

To address that problem, I turn to our reading from the Gospel of Mark. And this idea is repeated elsewhere in the gospels. The opening line really says it all. "But about that day or

hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.” And I think we overlook that too often. Because what we're told to do is to keep alert and keep awake and know that it could come. But we don't know when. So, that does leave us with a rather big question. And it can be a rather difficult one. Then when is the end coming? And I would say, based on everything that I have read, everything that I have gone through studying the Bible, I can tell you for certain: we don't know. Is that an unsatisfying answer? For some it may be. But here's the thing. If we base our lives around guessing when the end will come, we're going to spend too much time trying to predict when it will come and not enough time thinking about what it means. We could spend our entire lives trying to figure out when the end will come and not one moment living our life trusting that whenever it does that we will be in God's hands. And for me, this has quickly become an issue of “does it matter?” Now, one might find it odd for me to say I don't know that it matters when the end comes. But here's my reasoning. Do I know if the end is near? No. Does it change how I live my life? Also no. Why doesn't it change how I live my life? Because if I live my life trusting that God will be with me from start to finish, that God is in control, that the reign of God lasts forever, then I don't have to worry about it. Because the end is just another stage. But if I trust that I walk with Christ every step of the way, then I will walk with Christ now and I will walk with Christ in the end and I will walk with Christ always, so why should I worry? Why should I be concerned? And because I trust that God will be with me no matter what I'm not overly concerned with when the end comes. I'm always open to discussing what and how the end will come, looking at what we might be able to glean an understanding of and see how that changes the way that we live our lives.

But I have yet to figure out a way that knowing when will alter how I live. Because the best thing that any of us can do is to live our life, and each day we try to love more and worry less. Because, for me, that's what a life in Christ is. Being perfected in love so that I can live a life based in love. And so maybe it doesn't matter if the end is imminent, or the end is far off. Maybe it doesn't matter that Paul was mistaken. Paul is human. We all make mistakes. Maybe what we're being told when we're told that no one knows is that if we try to pick a date it's because we're trying to figure out how long we have before we have to make up for our mistakes. The better response is to forgive today because you can forgive today. Seek forgiveness today because you can seek forgiveness today. Love today because you can love today. And whatever comes tomorrow will come. Regardless of what comes, Christ is with us. Regardless of what comes, God is in control. Nobody knows what will happen tomorrow. Except we do know this. Tomorrow will be another day in which Christ invites us to walk in his ways, invites us to love one another, and invites us to be in community with all. It is another day that we may be alert to seek out chances to love greater, to serve God better, and to share the good news. So, the question I ask is this: does it even matter when the end is if we will be with Christ yesterday, today, and forevermore? Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. Help us to live a life by your wisdom, that we may love and forgive through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – *Questions of Faith*

In this series, Pastor Cameron will be answering questions that have been asked of him at various times. If you have a question you'd like him to address as part of this series, just let him know.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley	Family of Jim Nichols
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Sue & Bob Smyser
Family of Bob White	Family of Sonya Bickers	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan
Adam McMechan			

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