

Gospel lesson

We pick up immediately after we left off last week, when Jesus finished teaching at the temple.



picture from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2Q_UGwWY2U;
credit: LUMO

Mark 13:1-8

(NRSV)

¹As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"

²Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,

⁴"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"

⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray.

⁶Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray.

⁷When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still

to come.

⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.

The word of God for the people of God

<Children's time>

<Hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness">

UMH #140>

Message: Do Not Be Alarmed



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/truth-telling/twenty-sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/twenty-sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Peaceful Eternal God,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may understand clearly what You would have us learn and live as You would have us live. Amen.

We continue the "Truth Telling" series today with a reminder: "Do Not Be Alarmed."

"Remember, Jesus didn't attempt to make the evil of

the world and the goodness of God make sense. Instead, Jesus proclaimed the goodness and love of God in the face of the terrible things we humans do to one another and creation.

May our worship—our prayers, our creeds, our proclamation, and our blessings—do the same.”¹



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/students-listening-in-class-5427996/>;
photo credit: Tima Miroshnichenko

I substituted at the school on Friday as a floating substitute – going into various classrooms for an hour or so while the various teachers went to their individual meetings. Most were fine, but I did have a rough time with one rowdy class in particular. A couple of the kids would not stay in their seats, and focus on their misbehavior prevented the other students from paying attention to the class activity.

At one point, one of the students turned off the lights, something only the teacher is allowed to do. When the teacher shuts off the lights, it is expected that all the students will quiet down and focus on the teacher. In this case, the students got louder, complaining that the other student was not allowed to do that.

I called for quiet over their complaints. What do you

¹ Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/truth-telling>.

think I told them when they continued to point out that it was a student that turned the lights off?

<Let them respond>

I told them that it does not matter who shut off the lights, they are supposed to be quiet and let the teacher sort it out.

We live in a sinful world, with much misbehavior – acts which damage relationships and hurt people. Like those rowdy students, many times people do what they want, not really considering the effects on others or the world as a whole. Sometimes someone does something that makes us focus on God again, and we complain to God that, according to the Bible, they are not supposed to do that.

What do you think God's attitude is when that happens? <Let them respond>

We are told not to judge, but to love God with all that we are, to love others as equals, and to trust God. That can be hard when others provoke us.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/fn-hannah-prayer/>;
credit:
www.fishnetbiblestories.com

Hannah was harassed by her husband's other wife about not having sons. Because she was focused on what the other was doing, Hannah was unable to fully

appreciate the blessings in her life, even when her husband tried to comfort her. But rather than seeking to undo or destroy what the other woman did, Hannah trusted God, offering give her son to the Lord's service if she could just bear one to stop the harassment. She sought good instead of revenge in the face of provocation, and was blessed for it.

I think we often look at what others do - their accomplishments, their position, and their stuff - and feel like we do not measure up. We want to do and be more like them, forgetting that not only do we contribute to society in different ways than they do, but we do not see what others keep hidden, the failings they do not want us to know. We are all important to God.

Frequently, we seem to think the things we see are more momentous than they are in the grand scheme of things, in the Lord's eyes. Our amazing country, the United States of America, has been lauded as a world superpower since World War II. It took over 150 years from the country's beginning to gain that status.



pictures from <https://www.pexels.com/search/united%20states/>, credit: Pexels; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/white-house-129112/>, credit: Aaron Kittredge; and <https://www.pexels.com/photo/flag-of-america-1202723/>, credit: Sharefaith

Eighty years later, some people are predicting the end of the republic as we know it. Are they right? Who knows? And what if they are, will our lives stop?

Are we suddenly going to be homeless after a peaceful transition, unable to get food, clothing, or other things needed for daily living? I doubt it.

Many people look at the mighty institutions built by this government and, like the disciples looking at the temple, comment about how impressive they are. Others call it a nation built on blood, remembering displaced natives and chattel slavery. I believe God looks at all of it with sorrow at the pain caused in its construction and awareness that, like all human projects, this one will not last forever either.

We can get all worried about the country and ask God if the end of our democracy is at hand, like the disciples asked Jesus about how they would know the temple was to fall. I think the Holy Spirit will point us to look with concern for other things: Are we following the word of God? Whose wisdom are we chasing, the Lord's or that of the media/society?



picture from

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Change to bring a new way of life, like birthpangs, often feels painful, but God is with us through it all. Paul wrote that the Lord made a covenant to us with the Holy Spirit, to put God's law in our hearts and on our minds. We can have confidence through Christ for new life, to hold fast to our hope in God,

and to provoke one another to love and good deeds.

If we build community relationships based on the love of Jesus, we will be ready to help our neighbors if they need it, they will be ready to help us if we need it, and the wisdom of God will guide us through any turmoil that arises.

So this week, I want you to:

- † Take a step back and breathe. Remember that God does not call us to blame or punish others when the lights go out, but to look to our Lord for guidance and wisdom, and to share nurturing love.
- † Consider the effects of what you do on others. Think about what you actually venerate and the message you are sending in that.
- † Pray to God for forgiveness and guidance on how best to reconcile with neighbors/loved ones, to move forward in a positive direction.
- † Look for ways to share God's love, nurturing both individual people and the community to healthier life. Ask God for help implementing a plan of true discipleship.

Do not be alarmed that the world as we know it is ending when terrible things loom on the horizon. Instead, live in love, that it may change your way of thinking, guide you into true discipleship in Christ, and transform both you and the world in the process.

With that in mind, let us respond with the