

Lectionary C November 15, 2015 Pentecost 25
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
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Daniel 12:1-3
Psalm 16
Hebrews 10:11-14, [15-18], 19-25
Mark 13:1-8

What Spurs Us?

Please pray with me. Lord God, as we come together today, we come with confusion, and burdens of life. We come feeling the pain and fear of the people of France. We come to you seeking guidance and assurance that your promises are more powerful than violence and evil in the world. Open our ears and hearts this morning as we listen to your word and worship your holy name. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

So I had been working on this sermon all week, thinking about how Jesus' words in Mark's Gospel spoke to us today. And then the attacks on Paris happened.

I wonder how Jesus would change this gospel story if it happened right now, today, just after terrorists attacked Paris.

Because, I tell you what, some people take this message in today's Gospel as Jesus' warning that the end of the world is coming soon. And with the horrible attacks in Paris—well, some are jumping on that “fear” band wagon. It is hard not to, when our freedom and our way of life are threatened.

I think Jesus would address this terrorist abomination head on. He would call it what it is. He would weep for the victims and reach out to comfort them and their loved ones in this time of despair. He would address the world and call for unity.

I'm pretty sure Jesus was standing with Paris archbishop Cardinal André Vingt-Trois as he appealed on behalf the French citizens to God for the grace to be “artisans of peace.” And Jesus was there when the cardinal spoke these words,

“Faced with the violence of men we can receive the grace of a steadfast heart without hate.” The French prelate called for people to not give in to panic or hatred.

In times especially like what happened in Paris panic and fear is our worse enemy. That is what Jesus knows now and that is what Jesus was telling the disciples two thousand years ago.

At the time Mark wrote this Gospel passage the people around him were facing some tough challenges of their own. There was the huge social and religious turmoil caused by the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Many were probably being persecuted by both secular and religious forces, and there was much confusion among Jesus' followers about whether they had missed his second coming. Not to mention painful conflicts between rival Christian leaders.

Like the attack in Paris yanked the security blanket out from under our world, the people Mark was addressing were in the middle of a very scary time.

They needed to hear from Jesus and so do we.

So Mark wrote about some of the disciples asking Jesus about the end of the world. Here are Jesus' words from the Message Bible. , *“Watch out for doomsday deceivers. Many leaders are going to show up with forged identities claiming, ‘I’m the One.’ They will deceive a lot of people. When you hear of wars and rumored wars, keep your head and don’t panic. This is routine history, and no sign of the end.”*

Jesus told his disciples that, yes, things happen in this world. And in their particular situation, because they were his followers, they were heading for a bad patch. It would be painful and just downright miserable for them, but he assured them, *“Stay with it—that’s what is required. Stay with it to the end. You won’t be sorry; you’ll be saved.”*

Evidently false prophets were really having a hay day with the people in Jerusalem. However, by now in 2015, we have read about and witnessed a slew of false predictors of doom. And it has never happened.

I did a little research. Since January 1, 2000, there has been twenty different predictors of the end of the world. Most people today, don’t take those threats seriously. Especially the one that happened recently, I think it was in 2012, where the very people said they believed the end of the world was happening were selling souvenirs! Made no sense to me.

I agree with commentator, David Lose. He says, *“While we aren’t likely to be tempted away from the faith from whatever groups or charismatic leaders lured some of Mark’s sheep from the fold, let’s be honest: there are still many things claiming our allegiance and promising us salvation.”*

There is this human need to know our future is secure. Knowing when the world is ending seemed to help the people in Mark’s day. It gave them an extra edge on those poor souls who were going about their business with no clue what was happening to them.

And we have our own means of false security. Money will insure our future, right? Tell that to someone dying of an incurable disease. Fame doesn’t help either, or power or stuff. But we still unconsciously look to things we can do or acquire for security. That’s why when violence intrudes our lives we can panic. Fear can trap us. Fear can keep us from living the lives God calls us to live. We can’t go and share God’s Love with others if we are so involved with protecting our own hides and we become our own false prophets. And the things we have and can do for ourselves—well, they turn into gods for us.

Psalm 16 says, *“Don’t just go shopping for a god.*

Gods are not for sale.

I swear I’ll never treat god-names

like brand-names.

⁵⁻⁶*My choice is you, GOD, first and only.*

And now I find I’m your choice!

That last little phrase is our saving news. It is good when we choose God, but the real gift is that God chooses each one of us. The Hebrews text for today explains what a miraculous gift this is.

“Christ made a single sacrifice for sins, and that was it!... It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people.” It goes on to say, *“So, friends, we can now—without hesitation—walk right up to God, into “the Holy Place.”*

In this time of fear, we are free. Yes, let's be honest and admit what happened in Paris, just like what happened on 9/11, scares the socks off us. But the point is, because of Jesus' one time gift, we are not paralyzed or controlled by that fear.

When we don't fear for our salvation we gain courage to boldly face fear. We are not preoccupied with saving ourselves. Jesus already took care of that. Isis and other fear breeding forces will be not more powerful than Jesus' blood. We are free to love even those who hurt us.

The author of Hebrews puts it this way, *“So let's do it—full of belief, confident that we're presentable inside and out. Let's keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word. Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshipping together as some do but spurring each other on...”*

There it is. Keep coming together, worshipping God in this place called Grace and Peace that is our job especially when fear tries to grip us. Coming together is what spurs each of us on and encourages us and gives us the strength, boldness and courage to not react to fear but to pray for and support each other. And especially today, as we lift up our hurting neighbors across the sea. Amen

