

There is something about the end of the world scenarios that make movie directors and producers want to go out and start filming. There was an edition of Armageddon's coming simply called 2012, the title of which is based on a prediction from Mayan mythology that the world will end on the winter solstice of the year 2012 as converted to our current calendar system. Then there are the movies about zombies, comets and meteors, aliens and robots, giant insects, and plagues.

I recall that some folks were saying that the end of the world was taking place when the tragic events of 9/11 happened. Others were adamant that when all the digital clocks turned to 00:00:00 on January 1, 2000, the computer world would implode, or explode, or something very, very bad would happen, as the world changed centuries – or not, depending upon how one counted the years. Y2K came and went and this old world kept revolving.

I have heard how in almost every generation, some event or series of events sparked speculation on the end of the world as we know it: the stock market crash of 1929, bringing the Great Depression; the War to end all Wars, as World War I was known (although a few people tried to call the 2nd World War that same thing); Haley's Comet in 1910; the Great Earthquake of 1906, during which San Francisco was almost wiped off the map; the Civil War of the 1860s; the events of

the Protestant Reformation; the coming of the year 1,000, the actual destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The *Gospel according to Mark* is "cautiously accepted by most scholars" to have been written in the late 60s, but perhaps as late as the mid-70s. Hence, the destruction of the Temple could have been known by Mark – thereby giving fact to the prediction by Jesus. Yet, in any case, the words of Jesus about the Temple's demise,

along with His clear teaching about how we are to view such catastrophes, wars, and natural disasters are to be understood not so much as literal, but more descriptive of the metaphor Jesus used to talk about His own impending death on the Cross.

Still, we Christians today grapple with such passages and their meaning. If we believe in the Second Coming of the Son of God, then how are we to live? Are we not like Peter, James and John, and Andrew who ask for the date, the sign, the time, the markers that will lead to that moment? Yes, we all want to know; mostly because we want to plan for the end. Yet, what we see in this passage is the call to be patient, and indirectly, to trust in God.

As a virtue, patience is not particularly natural. Neuro-psychologists who study our brains say that under stress we are “hard-wired” for fight or flight syndrome. Other scientists note how hunting societies teach patience to their young long before they are allowed to join the experienced hunters with weapons. As a fisherman and someone

who loves the outdoors, I, too, have found patience a hard attribute to develop. And, even gardeners and cooks need to learn to wait as the plants grow or the bread dough rises.

Here in *Mark*, amid all this talk of destruction, chaos, and fear, there is a word of hope. Jesus knows what’s in store for Himself; He knows of His own death – He’s been warning the disciples of it for a while. Now, He’s preparing them (and us by the way) for the time when He is not mortally with us; when He cannot encourage His disciples face-to-face. Jesus sees the group continuing – and growing – even as they suffer trials, beatings, the threat of death – all because of their allegiance to Him.

We probably haven’t experienced such dire events in our lifetime – being martyred because of our belief in Jesus and of our identification as Christians – I mean, not directly. But, there are other parts of the world where such persecution continues – in Africa, in the East, both Near and Far. On the other hand, even in the USA, we Christians find ourselves ostracized at times, ridiculed and mocked, and indeed

ourselves ostracized at times, ridiculed and mocked, pre-judged because of misunderstandings and preconceived notions about how all Christians have to think, feel, act, or say, because of one or more vocal groups on the edge of the whole of Christianity. Thus, one of the arts, as Tom Wright puts it, that we must learn as Jesus' followers is patience.

With patience comes trust. Jesus' teaching the disciples about the

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signs and false portents of the coming End leads to trusting in a sovereign and loving God. False teachers, frightening rumors, natural disasters tempt panic. As Jesus says, "These are the beginnings of the birth pangs." And, when such pain occurs, we look to trust something, Someone. We look for assurances that things will be alright – not in a wide-eyed, pie-in-the-sky type of blind optimism, but in the certainty that God is in control, that what will happen will not be such that all hope is lost, all love forgotten, all being is ended.

This hope comes through God's fulfillment in Jesus. It is in the sure knowledge that our Redeemer lives and that God's love is all-sufficient that we can bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. And, it is about this endurance that Jesus teaches in our passage this morning. Yes, we will very likely see another Katrina hit the Gulf Coast; we might watch another Mt. St. Helens blow her top; we might hear of another 'quake striking Southern California; we might even experience another 9/11 series of events. But, through the chaos, the fear, the anxiety, the uncertainty, we are called to be patient and to hope. Jesus Himself has said: "... the one who endures to the end will be saved."

Are you ready to go the distance?

Let us pray: Holy and almighty God, You have been faithful through all the generations. Your love remains steadfast, Your promises sure. In Jesus we know that You fulfill that which is promised, that which

encourages and comforts, that which brings new life. As we see and hear and even experience chaos swirling around us, let us remain calm, let us have patience, let us trust that You are here with us, that Your will for the coming Kingdom will be accomplished, and let our actions and words be witnesses to that hope, so that others will see and hear and experience Your love, grace, and mercy in, through, and as Jesus the Christ whom we call Lord and Savior. Amen.