

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twenty Fifth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

89th Sunday of Pandemic - Masked Service

Daniel 12:1-3

Psalm 16

Hebrews 10:11-14[15-18]19-25

Mark 13:1-8

11/14/2021

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

1As [Jesus] 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. 8For 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 birth pangs.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

## **The End of the World**

Good morning! In the summer of 2005 I was about to begin my senior year of high school and helping my then girlfriend move in to Kent State University. In a move that I am sure will surprise no-one, I found myself in the campus bookstore. It was here that I stumbled upon what might be the greatest literary work of my generation... *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*. It's written by Max Brooks, and it's a sort of satire. But to a teenager who spent more time than he cares to admit debating with his friends things like "who would win in a fight, Superman or the Hulk?," it was amazing. It took a joke topic and gave it serious thought.

Little did I know then, but I had found myself at the beginning of what can only be called the zombie-culture movement. Just a few years later Robert Kirkman's comic *The Walking Dead* was turned into a show on AMC. We saw a huge resurgence in zombie movies with recreations of *Dawn of the Dead* and *I Am Legend*. Other movies were brand new, like the zombie love-comedy *Warm Bodies*, and *World War Z*. We had shows like *iZombie* and the *Santa Clarita Diet*. You see, we love, no pun intended, consuming apocalyptic-type entertainment.

You can trace back through major blockbuster movies or number one selling books our fascination with end-times thinking. And don't think for one second that this is some new phenomena. Remember the not insignificant panic that swept the country when *War of the Worlds* played on the radio, causing many to think that Mars was attacking. But the trend goes further back than that. In the 1800's during the religious revival period that saw a new fervency for Christianity, many believers were convinced that the end of the world was coming. Now I'm not just talking about one

random person with a sign that says “the end is nigh.” The Millerite movement, as it was called, saw a LARGE number of the population convinced that the world was ending and the second coming of Christ was going to happen soon. In fact, they even had a date. October 22nd, 1844. People gave away houses, deeds, and belongings, they were so certain. As you can see, things are still going, so Miller’s math was a little off. It’s from this movement that we get modern day groups like the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

What is even more interesting is that this trend basically exists for the whole of humanity. Not only is there always a group of people convinced that the world is about to end, but there has also always been a source of entertainment in the form of some sort of writing to feed that fascination. 2,000 years ago it was apocalyptic writings. We see this in our Bible with books like Revelation and Daniel. It was a sort of New York Times bestseller at the time. Other books like the Apocalypse of Hermes or the Apocalypse of Thomas are always popular examples.

But we see small sections of other books in scripture that give us a glimpse of this end-times thinking, and our Gospel reading from Mark is one such example. This chapter of the Gospel of Mark is often called the “Little Apocalypse.”<sup>1</sup> I think you can see why. But what you need to understand about the reading today is that the Temple really was the center of the world for all Jews. At the time, all patterns and moments of Jewish life were focused on action in and around the temple. Synagogues as we know them didn’t exist yet, and so the temple grounds in Jerusalem were the center.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-33-2/commentary-on-mark-131-8-5>

Oh, and man was it a big temple! I remember reading once that it was the size of roughly 10 football fields, and that it took a rumored 20 men to close each gate. When the expansion of the temple was completed, it put 10,000-20,000 people out of work. So when Jesus says *“Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down,”* it was unbelievable. What was even crazier is that Jesus was right. Around the year 70CE a Roman army came in during a rebellion and completely leveled the hill on which it stood. All that is left is what we call the Wailing Wall.

But the point that Jesus was trying to make isn't that he can predict the future, but that our focus needs to stay on the right thing. When the disciples brag about what was built, they are caught up in what won't last. Even rock and stone erode after the passage of time.

Which reminds me. One of my all time favorite zombie movies is the original 1978 *Dawn of the Dead*. In it we see the zombies go to the only place their animal minds can think about, the mall. Romero, the director, is critiquing our culture and our need to consume, just as Jesus reminds us to keep our eye on him.

Here's the thing I love about all of these apocalyptic movies. They are all about the end of the world or the extinction of all human beings... but someone always survives! A small group of survivors always makes it through to the end. It's here that we see that the whole point isn't really about the end of the world at all, it's about hope. In our first reading from Daniel we hear: *“But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life... Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to*

*righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*<sup>2</sup> And where our Gospel lesson cuts Jesus short, he adds just a few verses later that the Son of Man will gather his people from all the ends of the earth. You see, death, or evil, do not get the last word. That belongs to Jesus, to God. And if that's not a message of hope, I don't know what is. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel 12:1-3 NRSV