

Proper 29C (Sunday of the Fulfillment), 2009

Text: Mark 13:24-37

Title: The End of the World

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The world will end in 2012. Or at least that's what the latest conspiracy theorists and Hollywood directors would have you believe.

In the past decade the number of movies made about the end of the world has been on the rise. Recently, the focus has been on natural disasters- killer asteroids hitting the earth, global warming causing massive flooding, a killer virus from the jungles of Africa or a gigantic volcano erupting from the bowels of the earth.

A few years ago, the nuclear holocaust movies were all the rage, and we were afraid that a world-wide nuclear war would bring about the end of civilization as we know it.

And there's always the alien movies, where invaders from outer space try to take over the world.

There's often a common thread running all through these movies about the end of the world. There's usually a single character who tries to sound the alarm and tell people that there's a problem. Usually it's a hard-working scientist who discovers the asteroid on a collision course with the earth, or melting in the polar ice caps, or a disease that threatens to become an epidemic, or some other natural catastrophe just around the corner.

The scientist tries to warn other people, other scientists, government officials, the news media, but is always dismissed and ignored. No one wants to believe that the world could come to an end.

But the scientist is always proved right in the end, and with the best special effects money can buy, we see the world brought to the brink of destruction. Sometimes the crisis is averted at the last possible moment. Sometimes it's too late, and a small remnant of people is left to try to rebuild civilization.

It sounds a lot like Noah. He told people that the world was going to end. But people didn't listen to him, they didn't change their ways, and the world was destroyed by a flood. Only Noah and his family survived.

The same thing happened with many of the Old Testament prophets. They warned the people to repent, to turn from their evil ways, and they were ignored, and they were struck by catastrophe. The temple was destroyed. The people were sent into exile.

Today Jesus tells us that the world is coming to an end.

It's easy to listen to Jesus when He talks about living a moral life, loving your neighbor, and all of that. He sounds like a calm, rational person. But what do you think when He starts talking about the end of the world? Are you willing to listen to Jesus?

Will Jesus be proved right, or does He sound like just another raving lunatic?

Every Sunday you confess that Jesus will be proved right. You confess in the creed that you believe that He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.

That's what you say. But is that how you live? Do you really live your life believing that Jesus Christ could return at any moment, at any time, without a single warning? Or do you live your life like you've got all the time in the world.

Sometimes when people are diagnosed with a terminal illness, the doctors will give them a timeline. They will estimate how long they have to live. You've got 1 year, you've got 6 months, you've got two weeks to live. Sometimes the doctor is right, and sometimes the doctor is wrong. But when the word comes that your time is running out, you'll probably make some changes in your life.

You may do things that you've always wanted to do, but never taken the time. You may go on a vacation and see the world. You may try to repair broken relationships with their friends and family, to set things right before the end. You may have difficult conversations with your loved ones, and tell them all the important things that often go unsaid.

If you really believed that Jesus could return at any moment, in a year, in six months, in two weeks, at two o'clock this afternoon, how would it change your life? Would you go out and do all those things that you've always wanted to do? Blow your life savings on a tropical vacation? Would you take the time to make up with that family member you've been feuding with all these years? Would you sit down with your kids and grandkids and tell them what they mean to you?

Would you try to make things right with God? Would you actually come to confession to unburden your soul and to hear God's words of forgiveness? Would you make an extra effort to tell other people in your life about Jesus, so that they, too, would be ready for judgment day?

Just think how your life would change if you knew that Jesus was returning soon. What would you do? How would you change your life?

Now Jesus doesn't give us a timeline. He doesn't tell us exactly when He's coming back. He doesn't even give us an estimate. And that's probably a good thing.

If Jesus told us exactly when the end would come, chances are we'd wait until the last possible minute to shape up.

If Jesus said, okay, I'm coming back on January 1, 2012, what would you do? You'd probably wait until December of 2011 to start getting ready.

It's like parents who leave their kids home alone for a week or two. For the first few days the kids enjoy their freedom. They may have some friends over. They let things go. They start to let the dishes pile up and house get messy. It's okay, we've got all the time in the world to clean up. But when it gets close to the time that mom and dad are coming home, then there's the huge rush to get everything back the way it's supposed to be. Now as long as the parents arrive home on time, there's no problem. But if they come home early, then there's trouble.

Jesus could come home early. He could come and find the huge mess that you've been putting off dealing with. Jesus warns that He could return at any time. So keep watch, stay awake and be ready.

Advent is coming soon. Next week will be the first Sunday in Advent. Advent reminds us that Jesus is coming and we need to get ready.

Jesus came as a baby in Bethlehem, and He's coming again. Advent is not just about getting ready for Christmas, Advent is not about decorating and shopping and baking and getting the house ready for Christmas.

Advent is about getting ready for Jesus' second coming. He's coming again, soon. And Advent is a time for getting ready.

Advent is a time for special devotion, for prayer and meditation on God's word. If you need a guide for your devotions, the booklet in your bulletin is a good place to start.

Advent is a time for confession and forgiveness. It's a time to do some spiritual house-cleaning. If you've been waiting for a time to come to confession, it's now. Call your pastor, make an appointment, come and hear the Lord's words of forgiveness.

Once you've been forgiven, you're ready to meet the Lord with joy and gladness, and not as a wrathful judge.

When I was younger, our family spent our summer vacations in Montana to visit family. Both of my parents were teachers, so we would go for three or four weeks at a time. We stayed with my maternal grandparents. While we were there, the rest of my aunts and uncles would come a stay for a week or two. The highlight of the summer, for me, was when my Uncle John came. He was the fun one. Just a little crazy. We would play games and have water fights and do all sorts of fun things with Uncle John.

The day that Uncle John came was always a big deal for me. He and his family would be driving from Seattle, so they would take two days to make the trip, usually arriving in mid-afternoon of the second day. This was in the day before cell phones, so we never knew for sure exactly when he would arrive. That afternoon, I would usually play outside in the driveway or the front lawn, so that I could see him coming. It was a small town, and there wasn't much traffic, so every time I heard a car coming, I would run to the street to see if it was him. I was so excited and just couldn't wait for him to come.

When we're prepared for Christ's return, that's what it will be like. We won't dread it, or fear it, but it's something to look forward to. His return will be wonderful thing. Paul says that when Jesus returns, those who are alive will meet Him in the air. We'll be so excited, we won't be able to wait until He gets here.

So take Jesus' words to heart. Watch, stay awake, be ready. Live your life as though He could return at any moment. Don't wait to make changes in your life. Don't wait to confess your sins. Don't wait to tell people about Jesus.

The world may end in 2012. The world may end in 20 minutes. The world may not end for another 20,000 years. So watch, stay awake, be ready.