

Today is October 31st - otherwise known as Halloween. Though for those of you participating in worship online, it might be a different day. You're PROBABLY all aware that we've been on a journey these past two weeks in worship thinking about the United Methodist Perspective on Death and Resurrection as we head toward All Saint's Day - which is officially tomorrow, Nov 1st, but we'll celebrate All Saints Day NEXT Sunday in worship. Those who have passed away since All Saints Day last year, whether a part of this congregation or ones that you love, we'll honor by speaking their names, ringing a bell and lighting a candle in remembrance.

I'm not sure if you'll believe me if I said I didn't intentionally plan it this way, but it's interesting that today, October 31 the topic in this series is - "The End - What Will it Be Like?" Yes, it's a reference to, not only the End of Days, but also our own personal end of life. As I prepared my message, however, I realized I can't possibly say what needs to be said - in one sermon - about both The End of Days and the end of our own personal life. So today I'll say a few words about the End of Days. Next week I'll say more about our own personal end.

First - The End - as in The End of Days.

I remember, about this time last year, about 7 months into the Covid shut down. I began to hear murmurings about apocalypse, end times, and revelation. Did you? The word apocalypse - apo kalypse - in Greek means unveiling or uncovering. apo - un, kaluptein, cover - uncover. Unveiling. Apocalypse. Hence the word Revelation - which is "to reveal". I wasn't surprised last year when I began to hear people talking about apocalypse, with all that was going on - a pandemic AND a difficult presidential election. I don't remember feeling anxious about the end times myself though. Were you?

In this time of still "not knowing" we're naturally yearning for unveiling, for uncovering, - for knowing - what the future will hold - or at least what tomorrow might hold. I think it's gotten a little better since this time last year. Would you agree? As a book of the Bible, Revelation doesn't give us any help in determining a start date for the end times. I believe there ARE a few locations in the Bible which do give us some pointers toward end times and how we are to

think about that in terms of time, but I'll come back to that later. The book of Revelation - I believe - and you might think I'm crazy - are words of encouragement in difficult times. Most people probably wouldn't consider Revelation as an encouraging book in the Bible.

In fact, we received this in the mail recently - the latest History National Geographic - with the front page heading "Apocalypse". The first page is a letter from the Editor, Amy Briggs, who wrote, "I would describe the Book of Revelation as pure nightmare fuel - filled with beasts, blood and a bottomless pit, among other horrors."

I'm not sure if the editor has read the whole book of Revelation, because in the end, it describes a scenario where God wins and sorrow is wiped away. When I go to the hospital, to visit someone really sick - I find myself reading to people from the book of Revelation more than any other book. Specifically chapter 21 verses 1-7. Images of a New Heaven and a New Earth, of God's very self dwelling among us where God will wipe every tear from our eyes and death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

You can see why I find myself turning to these words when standing beside someone in pain, fearful about not recovering, fearful about not knowing their future. It's like going to the end of the book to find out what happens and seeing that it's a good ending, so you go ahead and read from the beginning. I know people who do that when they read a novel. Maybe you do that?

I read these words in the hospital, because I can stand beside a dear one with complete faith and tell them what I fully believe will be their end, if they so choose - living forever with God in an amazing place - regardless of what they are currently going through. I can't tell them at that moment they won't have more pain in this world. I can't tell them they'll definitely recover. But I can recite a truth that lives beyond the tragedy and horrors we sometimes experience in this life. And can tell them God will never leave them, never forsake them. These are the best words I can say out loud in moments like that.

I want to tell you more about these words written in Revelation. They were written by John as it says in Revelation 1:4 "John to the seven churches that are in Asia". Scholars disagree whether it's John

- one of the 12 disciples and brother of James - or a different John who was the same age known as the Presbyter, or elder, in the church. But in verse 4 we learn he was writing to the seven churches in Asia, which is present day Turkey. His letter was meant to be read in those churches at that time in response to a very concrete, historical situation. The people of these seven young churches in the province of Asia were being persecuted by the Roman government. At the time of this writing, around 90-95 AD, the Roman authorities were just beginning to enforce worship of the Emperor as god. Domitian, the self-proclaimed 'Lord and God' was the ruthless dictator who reigned from 81 to 96 AD. At that time, the wicked seemed to be prospering and evil seemed to be winning, while the Christians were under enormous pressure.

The Greek word - thlipsis - pressure/affliction/tribulation - is used repeatedly in Revelation - intense, crushing pressure. Like in Revelation 2:10 it says, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested; and for ten days you will experience thlipsis - crushing pressure/tribulation." So in that time, John was writing to these seven young churches to ... give them encouragement and perspective - to specifically resist the demands of an emperor who demanded to be worshiped as god.

John used a very well known genre of writing, which wasn't unusual at that time. He created a symbolic world - using apocalyptic literature, it's called - using images to help show God's perspective. Dr. Lyons-Pardue of Pt. Loma Nazarene University taught an online class at my last congregation on Revelation. She said, "The Spirit makes scripture relevant to all generations, so be careful about interpreting Revelation according to our own, current, situation." She said doing that was promoting self-interest and was a self-serving task. In fact, John Wesley, one of the founders of our Methodist Movement wrote in his commentary of this book, "The Revelation was not written without tears; neither without tears will it be understood." So.....CAN we apply what we might read in Revelation to our own circumstances today and call this the end times?

My brother, Paul, experienced a strange situation last year which had everything to do with this question of End Days. He described how a friend of his - in his words - got excited about the apocalypse. His friend believed God had communicated with him that the end was near, so he quit his job without really telling anyone, packed just a few things, left everything else behind and went to live in a place he believed would be good to wait out the end. I'm pretty sure my brother said his friend moved to Bakersfield.

I said earlier I believe there are a few other locations in the Bible which do give us pointers toward end times and how we're to think about that in terms of timing. You know that the books Matthew, Mark and Luke in the New Testament are REALLY similar and are called Synoptic Gospels, or books that are to be "seen together" - syn - together, optic - see. And that scholars believe Mark was written first - that Luke and Matthew used Mark's writings to record their own version of what Jesus said and did.

One of the places in the Bible I think points us in the right direction about end times are words Jesus said that are recorded almost word for word in all three of these books - Matthew, Mark & Luke. I'm going to read from Luke's version, because there is one phrase added that helps me. If you want to look with me I'm going to read from Luke 21:5-9.

There is so much more there in all three books about the end times, which are hard to understand to say the least, and I encourage you to make time to read and study for yourself rather than just take my word for it or anyone else's. But I'll read one more short phrase from Mark's version, not included in Matthew or Luke and then I'll make a comment on all of it. Now I'll read Mark 13:32 & 33 "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come."

As I read this, one of the most interesting things is when the disciples ask Jesus to tell them when these things are gonna happen, Jesus replies, "Beware that no one leads you astray... for many will come and say 'The time is near', but do not go after them. And then Jesus says 'Do not be afraid.' I guess Jesus could have said - "I don't know when it's

gonna happen,” which Mark explains he doesn’t - only God knows. Instead Jesus says in these verses and many places afterwards if you keep reading - “Beware!”, “Watch out!”, “Be on your guard!”, “Be alert!”, “Keep Watch!”. And it might seem like Jesus is calling us to be watching out for the “signs of the times” he describes here - like if we just watch out for it, we’ll be able to predict what’s happening. But as I think about that more, it seems more true that Jesus is saying be on your guard and watch out - so we won’t be deceived by others claiming they know the future. Because no one knows. Only God.

I wrote in the margins of my study Bible a long time ago, you might not approve of writing in a Bible, that’s ok - I wrote “For Jesus, the greatest danger is not that we might UNDERread the signs of the times, but that we might OVERread them.” Hmm... What do you think?

The comedienne, Kate McKinnon, recently did a character sketch about all of this subject - knowing the End. She pretended to be a medical expert - she looked a little like Albert Einstein with the messy gray hair, a mustache and a long professor’s pipe she clamped in her teeth and long white lab coat and used a *german* - maybe? - accent?

The name she gave this character was “Dr. Wenowdis”. An interviewer starts the sketch saying, “We know you are highly respected in your field Dr.” to which the Dr. replied - “Wenowdis”. The interviewer goes on to state a few more things, each time with the Dr. replying, “Wenowdis. ..Wenowdis.” Then the interviewer makes a statement the Dr. thought questionable and the Dr. replied, “Dis..We do not know ‘dis.” A little exasperated, the interviewer interrupted and said “I’m sorry Dr. Wenodis, I’m a little confused. Are you saying, ‘We know this’ or are you just saying your last name? The Dr. replied, “Okay - Wenowdis is Greek in English it translate to “We Know this”. Then Kate McKinnon broke the 4th wall - she spoke to the audience - and revealed while laughing that this is such a crazy time, she started doing this character as a way to cope, a nice way to escape, she said, refreshing to play a character who um- who “Knowdis”. When will the pandemic end? Dis, we don’t know dis. “What will the end be like?,” she said We do NOT know dis. But the one thing we DO know is....that.... Nope, we don’t know dis.

The interviewer ended the sketch with her by saying, “I know this is very stressful. I know this is hard right now and I know that a lot of people are being very resilient. So don’t worry Kate. We can figure this out. We can do this. Kate said “We can do *what?*” We can do dis.

We don’t know exactly what the End Days will be like - or when. We don’t know! We don’t know this. But the Bible does reveal what the end will bring - spoiler alert - God wins. This we know.

As I’ve been doing the past two weeks - today I bring to you a few words about another CUMC member who passed away this year - Guy Parks. Beloved husband of Janet Parks, father of Theresa Morris and grandfather of Emma Parks, Guy passed away on June 17. Born in Maryland, he also lived in 4 other states before ending up here in California. He studied music education at Northwestern University where Guy became friends with a flutist who was in the orchestra - Janet Sunberg. During the winter seasons Guy and Janet played for the Florida Symphony in Orlando, where they fell in love and became engaged. They were married at Garrett Theological Seminary where Janet’s father, Dr. Sundberg taught as a professor. He also performed the wedding ceremony. After completing his Master’s degree, Guy was hired as Assistant Professor and Director of Bands at Eastern Baptist College in Pennsylvania. When Guy’s father needed help with his manufacturing business, Guy, Janet and their young family moved to Illinois. After that, Guy, Janet and their four children moved here to Corona to be near Janet’s dad and stepmom and once again they pursued their first love of teaching music. For 23 years Guy taught music and math for the Corona-Norco Unified School District. Students who graduated would stop him on the street to thank him for teaching them. We are thankful that the Parks family came to Corona and found their church home here and that Janet, along with Phil & Deb Wyatt, will continue that love of music by helping start up a church choir again. We thank God for Guy Parks and remember him today.