

“.....THE LAST WORD.....”

**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF
MARK (13:24-37) AND PRESENTED FOR
ORLEAN UMC ON NOVEMBER 29, 2020-----
(THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT)**

**THE END OF THE WORLD IS A THEME PLAYED
OUT A LOT THROUGHOUT HISTORY. IN A
CHILDREN’S STORY FROM THE 1800S, CHICKEN
LITTLE CRIES OUT TO ITS FRIENDS HENNY
PENNY AND GOOSEY LOOSEY----- “THE SKY IS
FALLING, THE SKY IS FALLING!” IN THE
1980S, THE BAND R.E.M. MADE A NAME FOR
THEMSELVES BY SINGING THE ROCK HIT, “IT’S
THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT.”**

TODAY WE GET THE SAME THEME IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK FOR THIS FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT. IT'S ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD, THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS, THE APOCALYPSE, AND IT IS NOT THE STORY WE EXPECT OR REALLY WANT TO HEAR, FOR THAT MATTER, IN THIS POST-THANKSGIVING, PRE-CHRISTMAS SEASON THAT IS MEANT TO BE FILLED WITH JOY AND LAUGHTER, FEEL-GOOD TALES AND CHRISTMAS CAROLS-----EVEN IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC.

I AM NOT SURE IF THERE IS EVER REALLY A GOOD TIME TO TALK ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD, YET IT SEEMS IN EVERY GENERATION OR EVERY YEAR FOR THAT MATTER THE CONVERSATION COMES UP. AS RECENTLY AS 2011 A SMALL RELIGIOUS GROUP HAD MAY 21ST SLOTTED AS THE END----- AND WHEN THAT FAILED A QUICK RECALCULATION WAS IN ORDER AND OCTOBER 21ST OF THE SAME YEAR BECAME THE SET DATE FOR THE SECOND COMING..... DECEMBER 21ST, 2012 WAS THE DATE THE MAYAN CALENDAR PREDICTED THE END....,BUT WE ARE STILL HERE.....

**WHENEVER A DATE LIKE THIS COMES AROUND,
MANY OF US LAUGH AND MAKE JOKES THE DAY
BEFORE, ASKING THE PEOPLE WE KNOW,
“WELL, LAST DAY ON EARTH, WHAT ARE YOU
GOING TO DO?” AND THEN WHEN THE END
DOESN'T COME, MANY OF US LAUGH AGAIN,
SAYING, “SEE, THOSE PEOPLE ARE CRAZY.”
BUT I THINK THAT DEEP DOWN INSIDE ALL OF
US, THERE IS A PIT IN OUR STOMACHS WHEN
THE CLOCK APPROACHES THOSE “PREDICTED
TIMES.” I THINK THERE IS A SMALL VOICE INSIDE
EACH OF OUR HEADS THAT SAYS, “BUT WHAT IF
THIS TIME, IT REALLY IS IT?”**

PERHAPS WE DON'T OFTEN THINK ABOUT IT IN SUCH SUPERNATURAL, DOOM AND GLOOM WAYS. BUT RATHER, IN NATURALISTIC WAYS, I THINK WE KNOW OUR PLANET IS IN TROUBLE AND WE CAN SEE THE SIGNS OF DESTRUCTION. SIGNS OF SPECIES DYING OUT, LIKE THE NOW EXTINCT BLACK RHINO.....AND WE HEAR OF COLLAPSING GLACIERS AND WE CONSTANTLY SCAN THE SKIES FOR POTENTIAL CELESTIAL CALAMATIES THAT COULD POSSIBLY ALTERED OUR PLANET FOREVER AND EVEN BRING AN END TO THE HUMAN RACE.

REPORT THIS AD

EVEN THOUGH MANY OF US DO THINK ABOUT AND EVEN WORRY A BIT ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD, WHAT ON EARTH ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH THIS TEXT TODAY, ON THE BEGINNING OF ADVENT, THE TIME WE WAIT FOR THE BIRTH OF CUTE BABY JESUS, NOT THE END OF THE WORLD?

SOMETIMES, IN ORDER TO TRY AND UNDERSTAND A PIECE OF SCRIPTURE THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO MAKE SENSE OR IS JUST PLAIN HARD TO WRAP OUR ARMS AND HEAD AROUND, WE HAVE TO KNOW THE CONTEXT.

WHENEVER SOMETHING IS WRITTEN DOWN, IT IS ALWAYS INFLUENCED BY THE CONTEXT AROUND IT..... FOR EXAMPLE ----IN 1940, THE FAMOUS AUTHOR C.S. LEWIS WROTE A BOOK CALLED *THE PROBLEM OF PAIN*, IN WHICH HE TRIED TO EXPLAIN WHY PAIN AND SUFFERING EXIST IN A WORLD THAT IS CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN CREATED BY A GOOD AND ALL-POWERFUL GOD. LEWIS CONCLUDES THAT PAIN AND SUFFERING ARE GOD'S MEGAPHONE TO GET OUR ATTENTION AND TO TURN IT TOWARDS GOD TO MANY, IT IS A COLD AND CRUEL WAY OF EXPLAINING THE PROFOUND PAIN THAT SO MANY ENDURE.

BUT THEN, IN 1960, LEWIS' WIFE DIED. AND HE WROTE A FOLLOW UP BOOK, A *GRIEF OBSERVED*. SUDDENLY FOR HIM PAIN NO LONGER SEEMED LIKE GOD'S MEGAPHONE, NOW THAT HE HAD EXPERIENCED IT UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL. INSTEAD, PAIN WAS MORE LIKE GOD'S MUZZLE, FOR GOD SEEMED SO SILENT. OUR CONTEXT AFFECTS WHAT WE WRITE AND WHAT WE THINK.

FOR THIS REASON AND IN LIGHT OF THIS END OF THE WORLD THEME, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO KNOW THE CONTEXT AROUND THE GOSPEL OF MARK.

IT WAS WRITTEN SOMETIME AROUND THE YEAR 70, ABOUT 40 YEARS AFTER JESUS DIED. WHICH IS THE SAME TIME OF THE JEWISH-ROMAN WAR. THE JEWISH COMMUNITY LED AN UPRISING AGAINST THE ROMAN EMPIRE, WHICH EVENTUALLY LED TO ROME TAKING OVER JERUSALEM. DURING THIS HOSTILE TAKEOVER, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF JEWS WERE KILLED AND THE TEMPLE, GOD'S DWELLING PLACE, WAS DESTROYED. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOUR FAITH WHEN SO MANY OF YOUR PEOPLE ARE KILLED AND THE HOUSE OF GOD, THE PLACE WHERE YOU BELIEVE GOD TO BE LOCATED, IS DESTROYED?

SUDDENLY, EVERYONE IS ASKING, WHERE IS GOD WHEN GOD'S HOUSE IS TORN DOWN? IS GOD LOST? IT IS GREAT AND UNIMAGINABLE SUFFERING. PERHAPS IT EVEN FEELS LIKE THE WORLD IS COMING TO AN END. THE AUTHOR OF MARK'S GOSPEL, AS HE IS WRITING, IS LIVING IN THAT TIME OF WAR AND CRISIS OF FAITH. NOW IMAGINE YOURSELF AS AN ORIGINAL READER OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK, BACK AROUND THE YEAR 70, WITH SMOKE AND DUST FROM A LOST WAR STILL LINGERING IN THE AIR, AND FAMILY MEMBERS DEAD AND GONE.

**LISTEN TO THE WORDS THAT JESUS SPOKE,
WHICH SEEM TO RELATE SO MUCH TO THE
SUFFERING THAT YOU HAVE JUST
EXPERIENCED. “BUT IN THOSE DAYS, AFTER
THAT SUFFERING, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED,
AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND
THE STARS WILL BE FALLING FROM HEAVEN,
AND THE POWERS IN THE HEAVENS WILL BE
SHAKEN. THEN THEY WILL SEE ‘THE SON OF
MAN COMING IN CLOUDS’ WITH GREAT POWER
AND GLORY. THEN HE WILL SEND OUT THE
ANGELS, AND GATHER HIS ELECT FROM THE
FOUR WINDS, FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH TO
THE ENDS OF HEAVEN.”**

CAN YOU SEE WHAT THE AUTHOR IS TRYING TO SAY TO HIS PEOPLE? “THESE DAYS HAVE BEEN DARK,” JESUS SAYS, “THE VIOLENCE HAS BEEN SO THICK THAT IT FEELS AS IF EVEN THE SUN CANNOT PENETRATE IT, THE MOON DOES NOT SHINE THROUGH. IT IS AS IF THE HEAVENS ARE SHAKING AND THE STARS ARE FALLING ON US.

**O GOD, WHAT IS HAPPENING? IS THIS THE
END?...**

BUT THEN OUT OF THE CLOUDS ALL WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING. HE WILL COME WITH SUCH GREAT POWER AND LIGHT THAT THE DARKNESS WILL BE CAST OUT TO ALL CORNERS.

ANGELS WILL COME AND THEY WILL GATHER ALL OF YOU UP. THIS WAR WILL NOT BE THE END OF YOU AND THIS VIOLENCE WILL NOT BE THE LAST WORD, FOR GOD AND THE ANGELS ARE COMING.”

THIS IS A MESSAGE OF HOPE THAT THE AUTHOR IS GIVING TO HIS PEOPLE WHO ARE HOPELESS.

IT IS A MESSAGE THAT SAYS THE PAIN AND SUFFERING THAT YOU EXPERIENCE WILL NOT BE THE LAST WORD.

IN 1993, A MAN NAMED LARAMIUN WAS SHOT AND KILLED IN MINNEAPOLIS BY ANOTHER MAN NAMED OSHEA. ABOUT 13 YEARS AFTER THE SHOOTING, LARAMIUN'S MOTHER, MARY, WENT TO VISIT HER SON'S KILLER IN PRISON. AFTER THAT VISIT, SOMETHING HAPPENED, SHE SAID. ALL THAT HATRED AND ANGER SHE HELD FOR SO MANY YEARS AGAINST THIS MAN WHO KILLED HER SON JUST MELTED AWAY. NOW TODAY, SOME 27 YEARS AFTER HER SON'S DEATH, MARY AND OSHEA WORK TOGETHER FOR AN ORGANIZATION THAT THEY FOUNDED CALLED *FROM DEATH TO LIFE*, -----

IT IS AN ORGANIZATION THAT SEEKS TO END VIOLENCE BY BRINGING ABOUT HEALING AND RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE FAMILIES OF VICTIMS AND THE PERPETRATORS. IT'S A STORY THAT MADE NATIONAL NEWS. MARY, A MOTHER, AND OSHEA, A MURDERER, HAVE DECIDED THAT HATRED AND VIOLENCE WILL NOT BE THE LAST WORD.

JESUS SAID, "THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT...BUT THEY WILL SEE THE 'SON OF MAN COMING IN THE CLOUDS' WITH GREAT POWER AND GLORY."

**THIS WAR WILL NOT BE THE END OF YOU AND
THIS VIOLENCE WILL NOT BE THE LAST WORD,
FOR GOD AND THE ANGELS ARE COMING.**

**WELL-KNOWN PREACHER AND AUTHOR TOM
LONG, TELLS A STORY ABOUT A
CONGREGATION IN KENTUCKY. THE
CONGREGATION IS IN A TOWN THAT HAS
BECOME LITTERED WITH VIOLENCE. IT IS ALL
OVER THE NEWS, IT IS WORRIED ABOUT AMONG
THE RESIDENTS, AND JOKED ABOUT BY THE
MORNING DJ'S..... IT HAS BECOME AN
INFECTON FOR THIS TOWN. THE PASTOR OF
THIS CONGREGATION DECIDED THAT ANOTHER
WORD NEEDED TO BE SPOKEN BY THE CHURCH.**

ONE SATURDAY, ON AN IMPULSE, HE TOOK THE PROCESSIONAL CROSS FROM THE CHURCH AND HE WENT TO ALL OF THE PLACES WHERE VIOLENCE HAD OCCURRED IN THE PAST WEEK. HE PLACED THE CROSS IN THAT SPOT, AND HE PRAYED FOR THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AND FOR THE ONES WHO BROUGHT ABOUT THE VIOLENCE. EVENTUALLY, WORD TRICKLED OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY ABOUT WHAT THIS PASTOR WAS DOING AND NOW EVERY SATURDAY, A GROUP OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS GOES TO THE PLACES OF VIOLENCE AND PUTS A CROSS THERE, AS IF TO SAY, “VIOLENCE AND HATRED WILL NOT BE THE END OF US AND IT WILL NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD.”

**JESUS SAYS, ““BUT IN THOSE DAYS, AFTER
THAT SUFFERING, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED,
AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, ...BUT
THEY WILL SEE ‘THE SON OF MAN COMING IN
CLOUDS’ WITH GREAT POWER AND GLORY.”**

**IT IS A MESSAGE OF HOPE, YOU SEE – THIS
IMAGE OF JESUS COMING IN THE CLOUDS. IT IS
A MESSAGE THAT SAYS THE PAIN AND
SUFFERING THAT YOU EXPERIENCE WILL NOT
BE THE LAST WORD. FOR GOD AND THE
ANGELS ARE COMING.**

DURING THIS ADVENT SEASON, AMIDST THE EASY AND SOMETIMES THE JUST TOO SWEET COMFORT OF HOLIDAY CHEER, DEEP DOWN IN OUR INNER BEING WE KNOW THAT THE WORLD IS A FRAGILE PLACE AND THAT ALL IS NOT WELL WITH IT..... WE KNOW THAT SOLDIERS ACROSS THE WORLD FACE VIOLENCE EACH DAY..... WE KNOW THAT MANY OF US STRUGGLE TO KEEP OUR HEADS ABOVE THE MOUNTAINS OF DEBT AS WE HAND OVER OUR CREDIT CARD YET AGAIN TO THE CLERK AT THE STORE..... AND WE KNOW HOW OUR BODIES CAN SEEM TO BETRAY US AND GIVE OUT SOONER THAN THEY SHOULD.....

**WE KNOW ALL TOO WELL ABOUT A VIRUS
CALLED COVID-19 AND WHAT IT HAS DONE TO
OUR WORLD AND WE KNOW FAR TOO WELL
ABOUT ANGER AND EVEN VIOLENCE AS OUR
POLITICAL DISCOURSE HAS DETERIORATED TO
NEW LOWS----NEW LEVELS OF NON-TOLERANCE
OR UNDERSTANDING OR ANY THOUGHTS OF
COMPROMISE OR THE GREATER GOOD-----OF
BLUE OR RED---**

**THERE IS DARKNESS IN THE WORLD AND IT
SEEMS TO BE CLOSING IN ON US AS WE GO TO
WORK IN THE DARK AND WE COME HOME IN THE
DARK.**

SO THEN WHAT DO WE DO? IN THIS ADVENT
SEASON, WE WAIT. NOT ONLY FOR THE COMING
BIRTH OF JESUS, WHICH WE KNOW TO HAVE
ALREADY HAPPENED, BUT WE ALSO WAIT FOR
THE COMING OF THE LIGHT OF GOD INTO THIS
WORLD TO MAKE EVERYTHING RIGHT AGAIN.
AND AS WE WAIT, WE LIGHT ONE SMALL LITTLE
ADVENT CANDLE. AND THEN NEXT WEEK WE
LIGHT ANOTHER. AND THEN ANOTHER. AND
THEN ANOTHER...FOR THE SON OF MAN IS
COMING IN THE CLOUDS WITH GREAT POWER
AND LIGHT, WHICH MEANS DARKNESS AND
DESPAIR WILL NOT BE THE LAST WORD.

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN**