
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

June 14, 2015

*“When you hear of wars and reports of wars, don’t be alarmed.
These things must happen, but this isn’t the end yet.”*

Mark 13:7 (Common English Bible)

Some years ago, I interviewed for the position of senior pastor for a church located in New Jersey. I did not seek out this opportunity; they sought me – receiving my name from someone who thought I would be exactly what they were looking for in a pastor. This search committee had narrowed their search down to one other candidate and me. Grace, my wife, and I were brought to their community for a weekend for further interviews and becoming acquainted with one another. In the Presbyterian Church, this is the typical process for both the search committee and the pastor to discern if the potential relationship is a good fit.

Most of Saturday was given over to additional interviews and showing my wife and me the community. A delightful dinner was catered in the main dining hall of a major corporation headquartered in that state. The following morning – Sunday morning – I preached for the search committee my “trial” sermon. Everything about the weekend felt right for Grace and me and we were prepared to accept their call to me to be their pastor if they offered it. They did not. During lunch with the committee, following worship, they told my wife and me that everything about the weekend felt right to them except one thing they could not overlook. It was this: I preached that morning from a different translation of the Bible than what they preferred. I continue to believe that they choose as their focus that day, the wrong thing.

This is precisely the dynamic of this story from Mark’s thirteenth chapter; the disciple’s focus is on the “awesome stones and buildings” (Verse 1). Jesus shifts their focus from the present to the future, “Do you see these enormous buildings? Not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished” (Verse 2). The disciples had chosen as their focus that day, the wrong thing. Jesus then announces that evil is expanding – that things were going to get worse - and that all disciples had the responsibility to “watch out;” to be ready for the end. Yet, Jesus tells his disciples. “Don’t be alarmed” (Verse 7). What Jesus declares is that God is still in charge. Rather than becoming pessimistic about what the future holds, followers of Christ are to be optimistic about God.

The end is drawing near. Jesus wants all who hear him to know that we don’t have forever. This glimpse into the future is not a call to experience dread and despair. It is a call to focus on living faithfully in the present “just as if” the end will arrive any day. This is not the time to be living without Christ. Nor is it the time to be sloppy in our discipleship as if we have all the time in the world. “Don’t be alarmed” when the world looks hopelessly out of control, says Jesus. God alone will determine the end of time. Our responsibility is to pay attention to God in the present, have hope and always be seeking to live faithfully.

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