

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania
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Control-Alt-Delete

I just don't get it.

Don't get what?

I don't get all that stuff in the Bible about the end of the world. You know, all that stuff about signs in the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars. You know, earth quakes, and all that stuff.

What's not to get?

Well, what are they talking about? Are they talking about the end of the world?

Yeah, sure. The end of the world. That's what it sounds like to me.

I thought that Jesus was supposed to bring good news.

What's the matter? You don't think that the end of the world is good news?

Not particularly.

Jesus is talking about his return, when he comes back and his kingdom is completely established on earth. That's good news.

It sounds kind of scary to me, and destructive, and deadly.

Endings sure can be scary. And what did you think... that you were going to make it out of this life alive?

I guess not, but still, why does it have to be so dramatic?

Dramatic?

Yeah, you know, the "distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves." People fainting "from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world."

Sounds like global warming.

Come on, I'm serious.

Me too.

So why does it have to be such a nightmare scenario?

You mean, why couldn't it be something pleasant, like Jesus shows up one day with a beach ball and says, "Hey, let's have a barbecue!"?

That would be nice.

Well, beginnings and endings are always dramatic. Think of a love affair. The beginning of a love affair is always spectacular, but the ending can be even more spectacular. Think of building a house. It's very dramatic to watch a house go up piece by piece. And have you ever seen when they tear a building down?

Sure! I love watching it when they blow up those big buildings in the middle of a city, and it comes crashing down, falling on top of itself. That's cool!

See. Dramatic beginnings, and dramatic endings. Can you imagine what it was like when God created the universe? It must have been really spectacular. And don't you think that it will really be something when God re-creates?

I guess so. I never thought about it like that. Hey, even our own beginnings and endings can be pretty dramatic.

What do you mean?

I mean, you know, us, our birth and our death. They're both pretty dramatic.

Yeah, I see what you mean.

So, when do you think it will happen?

What?

The end of the world.

Haven't you seen the movie? In 2012.

Very funny.

You know, there have been a lot of people over the centuries who have tried to predict when the end will come. They have tried to interpret current events in terms of the scary stuff that is mentioned in the Bible. Some of them have been pretty amazing. Fearing the return of Jesus at the end of the first millennium Russia converted to Christianity as the official state religion.

Wow. But he didn't return at the end of the first millennium.

No. Nor did he return at the end of the second millennium.

Yeah. And Y2K didn't crash our computers either.

Well, when do you think Jesus will return?

Is this a trick question?

No.

2012?

So say the Mayans. Do you really think that we are supposed to know when?

I don't know. Jesus does say that stuff about the fig tree.

You mean, that "as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near?"

Yeah, that stuff. Isn't he trying to tell us that there will be signs that we will be able to recognize, like we recognize when spring is here?

Well, like I said, people have *seen the signs* many times throughout history. The first generations of Christians had to deal with serious persecutions. They must have felt that the world, at least as they knew it, was about to end. In fact, for many of them, the world did end, didn't it?

Yeah, a lot of them were put to death in those persecutions, weren't they?

Yes. For them, the end came. Jesus wanted them to know that even in their worst time, he would be with them. And that even if terrible things happened, they should remain faithful. It doesn't mean that God doesn't love them if they go through terrible times, suffer, and even die. In the end, Jesus will reign, and his rule of love will be the final word.

So, maybe that's the message for the rest of us too.

What do you mean?

I mean, maybe it's not about when the end will come, or even if it really is the end of the world, or just the end of our own life. Maybe all that stuff in the Bible about the end is just to help keep us on the right track. It's like, when Jesus tells us to, "be on guard so (our) hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life," maybe he's telling us that all we really have is now, tomorrow is never certain. I mean, the world could end tomorrow, right?

Sure.

I know, right? Anyway, all we really have is now. So now is the time for us to get ourselves right with God. It's kind of like my garage.

Yeah... Wait, your garage?

Yeah, my garage.

Now I don't get it.

I'm always saying that sometime soon I'm going to clean out my garage. Well, who knows how long I have in this life. If my garage were really important to me, I better get to it today, because tomorrow may never come.

But, you're not really talking about your garage, are you?

No. I'm talking about how much I pay attention to God in my life. I can't always think that there will be time to work things out between me and God, or between me and anyone else, for that matter.

Yes, we can get distracted by many things. Even trying to figure out when the end will come can be a distraction.

That's what I'm talking about. We don't know. We might see the signs that our end is near. We might face suffering, pain, illness, old age, but Jesus doesn't want us to worry about any of that. Just keep focused on him, and what he promises.

What?

What, what?

What does Jesus promise?

Jesus promises that when the end does come, he will be the ultimate thing, not death, but life. Life renewed. Life transformed. Life abundant. Life eternal. When the end comes, we will not be alone. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. He will not abandon us to death and the grave. He will welcome us into his kingdom, and make us eternally joyful. That's what I think.

Wow. I think you've got it.

You think?

Amen.

Amen.