

Sisters and brothers: The Holy Gospel for the day is from St. Mark's "little apocalypse" which takes up the entire 13th chapter. It is the largest collection of Jesus' teaching in Mark.

"Apocalypse" is a Greek word usually translated as "revelation." People often look at Biblical literature like the "little apocalypse" in the hope of answering the question about when human history will be gathered into the arms of God. Folks want day, time, and circumstance. For some it is in earnest. For others it is a parlor game. For still others it is an occasion to imagine God doing horrible things.

In the late months of 1999 there was a lot of talk about the earth and all the creatures being brought back to God as the millennium turned from the thousands to the two thousands. Some of you remember "Y2K2."

On one of the December afternoons of 1999 I was sitting in the sauna at the "Y" in Bellingham visiting with a man I had worked with on a number of community issues. Another fellow shared the space.

Al asked me what the people at Faith Lutheran were thinking about the turn of the millennium. Were they worried? Were they planning for one of any number of possible disasters? How would they feel if it was the end of life and experience as humans knew them?

I explained that I didn't think anyone was worried. If God was going to wrap up history, they would be glad to see Jesus face to face. If disasters happened it wouldn't be the first time and God never abandons the people no matter what. And the end of things would mean that the time had come when God's will would be done on earth as in heaven – a moment we prayed for on a daily basis. Altogether it was an exciting possibility.

Al needed to get back to work so he left. The other fellow and I remained.

No sooner than Al left the other fellow said how nice it was to hear people talking about the Lord. I explained that I did that on a regular basis and it was nice – at least nice for me

– I hoped it was nice for Jesus, too. I paused a moment. A huge mistake.

The fellow began to talk about Jesus in ways I could hardly imagine. He said he loved Jesus and Jesus loved him, but there were all those “other” folks. In language I would never use and hope you would not either he defamed our sisters and brothers who are Gay or Lesbian, who are people of color, and women in general. Not too many people left off his list. All of those people were evil. And God was going to get all of them – probably January 1, 2000.

You would think a person with one working brain cell would have gotten up, showered, dressed quickly, and left. A person with at least one brain cell would have. I did not which probably says more about me than you should know.

When the fellow paused I told him with the straightest face that I could imagine that he should be careful how he talked about people and about God. I explained that the latest Biblical research hinted that God was female, African-

American and Lesbian, and if he continued making derogatory comments about people, God might get him.

None of that is true, but it served to quiet him. Then, I did leave, showered, dressed, and got to my car as quickly as possible.

I saw the fellow on a number of occasions after that. He didn't speak to me again. Miracles do unfold in ordinary life.

There are lots of folks with attitudes like that about God. God is coming. God has taken names. God will get "them" ("them" in this case is a movable feast depending on the heart and mind of the hater). "We" will be "ok" because "we" are super special.

Other folks imagine that they know the time when God will come to take the elect away from the trials and tribulations of this world. They speak of the "rapture" which is an obscure and barely mentioned notion in Christian Scriptures, but lately has received disproportionate attention. Do you remember the

fellow in Oakland who said the “rapture” would take place sometime last July?

I missed it, but being here one would easily conclude I missed it. Then, he revised his estimate because he was just as “here” as I was. The second calculation didn’t work out any better than the first, though he hasn’t done as well as the fellow in the sauna.

I am told that some who had trusted him, abandoned jobs and homes and family to wait for Jesus to take them are now suing the fellow for religious malpractice. I don’t know if he has insurance. With my brain and mouth I probably should re-up the policy I used to have.

All of these recent moments are not the first time. On a bunch of occasions in the 19th Century some did the math and came up with the day and time that Jesus would come to call history to a halt. As you might guess those calculations did not work out very well, either.

The truth is that figuring out the end of things is a waste of time. Jesus is clear in St. Mark, “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” God keeps God’s agenda and schedule very close to God’s heart. No one knows.

What remains for us is to wait. That is about as welcome as root canal work without anesthetic.

Part of what makes waiting so hard is there is a lot of darkness in this human adventure. Darkness seems stronger than light on some days. That is an illusion, but one that tempts us to despair. Jesus is the light of the world and the darkness will never overcome it, but on those “some days” that is harder to believe.

Our own stories bear witness to the darkness. Illness. Accidents. Broken relationships. Shattered dreams. Lost jobs. Disappointments of a greater or lesser degree. It is darkness.

And the newspaper reports add to a sense that darkness is more and more powerful. A two year old in nearby Bellevue

is missing, and there isn't much light surrounding his disappearance. A football coach from a respected NCAA program is accused of child molestation. That tragedy is magnified because people claim to have known about it without taking the steps the law, common sense, and human decency require. A woman at a Black Friday Wal Mart store used pepper spray on other shoppers to gain an advantage on the sales. Coward bombers – I prefer that designation to suicide bombers – kill and maim innocent people who are for the most part as non-political as the coward bombers are radically political. National leadership on both sides of the America aisle engage in marathon posturing while vulnerable people are looking for relief. It goes on. Darkness. And we are waiting.

I have been reading Henri Nouwen a lot lately. He writes about waiting. “Christian community is the place where we keep the flame alive among us and take it seriously, so that it can grow and become stronger in us. In this way we can live

with courage, trusting that there is a power in us that allows us to live in this world without being seduced constantly by despair. That is how we dare to say that God is a God of love even when there is so much (darkness) around us. Waiting together, nurturing what has already begun, expecting its fulfillment – that is the meaning of marriage, friendship, community, and the Christian life.” My Sister, My Brother, Life Together in Christ, p.44.

We wait. And if we are wise, we wait together. It is too lonely a job otherwise. Being active with one another in prayer and singing and hearing the promises of the Gospel and feasting on Christ in the Eucharist. Together gathered around the great reality. “The light is come into the world and the darkness (despite its fierce intent) cannot overcome it.”

We wait. And if we are faithful to God and one another the waiting reaches beyond our time together into all the other times we have. We do our duty as disciples in the places where

we are – the places where Jesus keeps company with us and hopes we will represent him well.

There is an old story about an enormous storm that moved over a city where a colonial legislature was meeting. The sky was dark at mid-day and the wind and rain so horrendous that it felt like the end was coming. People got very anxious.

Amidst the panic one man stood up and addressed the assembly. “I pray you sirs, that candles be brought so we can continue the business before us. If this is the end I prefer to be found doing my duty.” That is a wonderful way to wait.

A contemporary of ours said the same thing this way: “Jesus is coming. Look busy.”

In this Advent season we are waiting. Hang onto one another while you are here and when you are alone do the duty you have been called to do in your life and living and discipleship. Just don’t worry about the math. Jesus is clear. “But, about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels

in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Only the Father knows.

And be glad. When Jesus comes again it is because Jesus wants to put his arms around us and take us to the only permanent home any of us will ever have.