

Homily: 17 November 2024, Proper 28
The week of the 26th. Sunday after Pentecost
St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Appomattox, VA
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

"The future ain't what it used to be." So quipped Yogi Berra, Hall of Fame catcher for the New York Yankees. We could agree with Yogi in many respects. And, Jesus' followers hear something like that from Jesus. Yet, Jesus himself, later in this chapter, says that even he doesn't know everything about the future, like the time of the end.

Jesus Sabotages Our Ideas of Permanence

The Jerusalem Temple was a huge and ancient structure—laid on a foundation going back 900 years. It enclosed about 35 acres. The stones were three feet cubed. Such a structure would always be there. No, Jesus could see a collision with Rome and the razing of the building. The Wailing Wall is all that remains—a part of the western wall.

Our ideas of permanence get undermined by Jesus' teaching. I attended a game in Yankee Stadium. Gone now. That huge tract of hardwood timber near my Louisiana, 10x20 miles. Gone. Neighborhoods—interstates take them. Hurricane Katrina took a church I served. It's gone. In fact, we are awash in a sea of change. We are painfully aware of a lack of permanence. Polar ice caps are melting. For someone of my age, Malcolm Tolbert, my mentor and major professor was larger than life. We maintained our friendship over the three plus decades since I received my graduate degrees. But, he died Thanksgiving Day, 2014.

Paul Scherer compares our walk to someone high on a narrow catwalk. "
**We live on the narrow edge, a catwalk between confidence and misgiving,
doubt and faith, between seeing and not seeing."** @

In such uncertainly and chaos, where is our stability? The psalmist said in Psalm 62, "For God alone my soul in silence waits. God is my salvation." The visible world can seduce us into assigning it permanence. However, we are called to believe that the unseen world is permanent and the visible one is passing away. Permanence can be found only there, a God who does not quit. My well yields sweet, granite-filtered water even though I can't see the bottom. This world will be transformed into new creation, but permanence exists only in God and our relationship with God.

As the American poet, William Stafford put it,
**“Even the upper end of the river
 believes in the ocean.” #**

Jesus Sabotages Our Efforts to Predict the Future

Jesus describes what is coming—the invasion by the Roman army in 66-69 CE. As the prophets before him foresaw the consequences of political and military adventurism against superior imperial power, Jesus knew where their path would lead. But, he says that such events are not signs of the end; rather, they are only signs of the intensification of chaos, “the beginning of birth pangs” not the birth of the new age.

Some in our church culture read the lists of these events in the news and say the end is near. In defiance of Jesus’ teaching that the time of the end comes as a surprise and cannot be predicted, people still try and in so doing fly in the face of Jesus’ clear teaching.

You will remember American Christian radio host [Harold Camping](#) predicted that the [Rapture](#) and [Judgment Day](#) would take place on May 21, 2011, and that the end of the world would take place five months later on October 21, 2011.

He’s not the first. Hal Lindsay in *Late Great, Planet Earth*, foretold the end in 1988. They look for signs that herald these events when Jesus clearly said that such events were not signs (Mark 13:7), that no sign would be given (Matt 16); that the Kingdom does not come with signs to be observed (Lk 17:20).

Here, Jesus lists what are taken as signs and says the end is not yet. These things are NOT signs of the end. We cannot control the future or create greater certainty by trying to predict it.

Jesus says we can learn from what’s happening around us because it is the reverse of God’s future – birth pangs. The eye of faith is required to see our current chaos—genocide, famine, lack of drinking water, global climate chaos as birth pangs. God’s new future will be a reversal of our current chaos.

The creation groans under the weight of our chaos and suffering. God’s Spirit also groans. And, we groan as well (See Romans 8). We can take encouragement that what we yearn for, what we long for WILL happen. Jesus’ resurrection guarantees

that New Creation will emerge. The world will follow Jesus' lead into resurrection and new life.

Every bit of newness heralds the onset of new creation. Our community garden offers plenty to people in need. The New Creation will bring a huge community garden and there will be no hunger.

Lyrics of Mumford and Sons

**So give me hope in the darkness that I will see the light
'Cause oh that gave me such a fright
But I will hold on as long as you like
Just promise me we'll be alright \$**

My Invitation to You

So, today, let us resolve that we believe in the unseen world of God's presence and activity that envelops and surrounds us. Let us pray for a fresh release of hope. Let us throw ourselves into witness and service in this visible world because we believe that God will hallow God's name and make all things new in the end. Every bit of witness and service we offer will be like an acorn planted that will sprout.

"In all ages, (people) men have fought most desperately for beautiful cities yet to be built and gardens yet to be planted." %

Notes

@Paul Scherer, *The Word God Sent*. (New York: Harper, 1965), pp. 184-85.

William Stafford, *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems* (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf, 1998), p. 242.

\$ <http://www.directlyrics.com/mumford--sons-ghosts-that-we-knew-lyrics.html>

% Eric Hofer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper, 1950), p. 73. Cited by Jay Haley, *The Power Tactics of Jesus Christ: and Other Essays* (Rockville, MD: Triangle Press, 1986), p. 35.