

Finding our way in a world falling apart.

Is 2:1-5; Ps 122; Ro 13:11-14; Mt 24:36-44

The year 2000 and Y2K, brought out warnings from many people & created a lot of fear. This prompted a surge in the business of disaster preparedness – make sure you have your own generator, food, water, weapons, and so on.

This is just one of the many dates when it was predicted that the end of the world would occur. You can go on line and find many predictions – all of which did not come true. Also, there are many more dates predicted by all kinds of people and groups for the years ahead. Humankind has always been interested in knowing what will happen in the future. This curiosity has enriched and empowered quite a few people. So what are Christians to believe and do?

I suspect we all have a sense of impending doom because of the events we see and hear, at least I feel that way as I get older. We enjoy the blessing of technology but it's also a curse like with easy access to pornography – which isn't simply a male problem anymore. That's just one example of what seems to be a growing wickedness around the world.

The World Health Organization says, “The world is ripe for super plagues of apocalyptic proportions. We are standing on the brink of a global crisis in infectious diseases. At least 30 new diseases have emerged to threaten the health of hundreds of millions of people. For many of these diseases there is no treatment, cure or vaccine. Diseases that have been around for centuries are popping up in incurable strains.”

I don't know for sure if we have more natural disasters than before because we can instantly hear about them, if not see them occurring and can view the results. Is a hurricane a hurricane if we can't see it? Now with satellites we can see storms way out at sea – that before we never knew about because they did not touch land.

Also for example, in 1931, there were only about 350 earthquake detecting seismograph stations in the world. Today, there are 8,000 stations. It stands to reason that 8,000 stations are going to detect more seismic events. And our equipment is more sensitive now. Quakes that were undetectable—either because of intensity or distance—now are recorded.

We do have a sense that natural disasters seem to be worse. It seems 100 year storms of all kinds are every few years now. We pay attention to earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods and fires, because we want to know about them. Popular movie themes tell of asteroids colliding with earth, a volcano blowing up in the middle of Los Angeles or aliens invading to take over the earth. Lots of money is made through books, television and movies about human tragedy.

Also we do know the news media feeds off bad things happening. Rose and I noticed that one summer a few years ago, the U.S. news media constantly talked about a few white blond haired girls being kidnapped. This went on all summer long – the media obsessed about it. But hardly mentioned were the higher number of young children with darker skin color or white girls without blond hair that were disappearing.

So there seems to be a lot of pressure on us to be fearful from all kinds of sources, terrorism, spying, corrupt and incompetent governments, businesses who don't treat their workers with respect, ecological concerns, and on and on. We can't even assume that governments or people or businesses will act rationally in their own best long term interests. There seems to be a lot of selfish self-destructive behavior going on all around us. The world with our knowledge and resources and technology – should be getting better. But we still have wars and atrocities and addictions. So what are we as followers of Jesus to believe and do and even share with others?

Some say that the "The oldest and strongest emotion of humankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."

But I think God's love is the first emotion since we are created in God's image. As we mature in Christ we grow in perfect love casts out fear – even fear of the unknown. But how does this occur? How are we as followers of Jesus to demonstrate and live and witness to the love we find in the very character of God and in his Son sent to die for us so we have salvation?

Our scripture texts give us some answers. How are we to prepare for Jesus' return, for major and minor catastrophes? Personal and natural? How are we to help others get ready for Jesus?

We are to **be prepared**. But our preparation isn't physical, like a water supply, freeze dried food, a fortified hidden safe place or weapons. If you want to do those things I think its ok – up to a point. But what does the Bible tell us from our scripture texts about what kind of preparedness we are to engage in?

Our Matthew scripture says, **Keep watch**. Do not be like the people of Noah's day – who knew nothing about what was to happen – despite being warned, and seeing the ark being built. We must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when we do not expect him. Don't be lazy followers of Jesus. Keep living our lives, but also keep going deeper spiritually. Keep cultivating a better relationship with Jesus as well as improving as a witness of the cross and empty tomb.

Part of keeping watch as our Romans scripture says, **is understand the present time**. Notice what is happening around us. This is not for purposes of predicting, but it's for understanding how much the world needs Yahweh God. It's for naming good and discerning evil. We are to join in feeding life into people and resist those efforts and even people who don't build up individuals and the community and the world.

A form of wickedness is we have become so good at spinning truth. We sugar coat lies by calling them disingenuous. And we are experts at finding good reasons for our wrong doing. In our wrong doing we even have become good at convincing others we are the victim. Look at the situation with many politicians – they seldom admit they are wrong, and they often don't make decisions that are good for all citizens.

Peter Drucker who was a Christian and famous management consultant, when he retired said, "When you look around, it seems not much is working well anymore. Government isn't. Business isn't. Schools aren't. The only sectors in our communities that are changing lives for the better are churches and para church organizations. So I'm going to put my efforts into them until I die." He was understanding, discerning, the present time from his viewpoint.

Being prepared is keeping watch, understanding what is going on in the world, in our church, in our communities. Don't prepare by worrying or trying to predict what day the end will come.

Next, I think we are to prepare by repenting of our sins and our sinfulness. We get ready by **repenting and turning to right living**.

Our Romans text says, "Put aside deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently as in the daytime, not just in those easy to name sins like drunkenness and sexual immorality. " Then the writer of this scripture, the Apostle Paul, like he always does, names those harder to prove sins like jealousy and dissension. Next the text says, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about gratifying the desires of the flesh.

Repentance does not just happen once, it is a daily activity we must do to be ready for his second coming. We must clean ourselves daily, so we are ready for the second coming of Christ, or even a catastrophe like a flood, or illness, or war, or violence, or an accident that

takes our lives. Daily preparation is important. Daily I must repent because we do not know the time, when I will be called on to preach, pray, sing, praise, be generous or die. Daily I must repent because daily I sin.

C.S. Lewis said: “A Christian is not one who never goes wrong, but one who is enabled to repent & begin over again after each stumble, because of the inner working of Christ.”

Just like the beginning of Advent, and the start of Lent, each day is a time to prepare to honor Jesus. And one preparation we can do is repentance. Take off the dirty old self and put on the clean new self. Martin Luther talked about this as he tells us to drown our old self daily in the waters of our Baptism and then to rise up again as a new, forgiven person living in the grace of God.

We get ready for the coming of Christ through our acts of repentance. We acknowledge that we are in need of God’s grace through Christ. Repentance is the act of turning away from our sins to live a new life in Christ. If the second coming does come, or we suddenly die, God will see us as in our new selves, cleansed by the blood of Christ. God will recognize us because he made us clean through Jesus’ sacrifice.

Also, we are to prepare for the end times, for Christ’s return, for our own deaths, by being **people of peace**. Behaving decently as Paul encourages us, leads to peace. Our Psalm this morning tells us to pray for peace and that God will give us peace within. Obeying the 10 Commandments is being a good neighbor and is an act of peace.

Much of religious talk is focused on don’t do this, don’t do that, but if we turn it around and say, be people of peace by doing this and by doing that – it’s a much more attractive and effective way of witnessing and living. Peace is not just social justice & service it’s following and believing in Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Because we can only help peace happen out there and among us, if we have Jesus’ peace

within us. With all the fear in this world, being and encouraging the people around us to become people of peace as the Bible describes – that’s where perfect love casts out fear. That’s when people will feel secure despite their situations. That’s where there will be prosperity for all. Peter Drucker said, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

So to push back fear, by being people of peace naturally leads to being **people of hope and vision**. Hope in the baby we celebrate, honor & worship. Hope in the empty tomb. Let’s buy into God’s vision for this world by witnessing to the hope, vision & life we have received from Jesus Christ. This world needs to see the vision and hope of the Son of Yahweh God.

That’s what Christians are called to be. That’s why our text from Isaiah says disputes between people will be settled, swords will be beaten into plowshares, and nations will not train for war anymore. And it also says, we will be taught in God’s ways and walk in His path. So we need to be people of peace and vision and of hope to counteract the fears of this world. That’s our calling. To live God’s hope and share the vision.

Lastly, our scriptures call us to **worship** the God who send his Son Jesus to show us how to live and who died for our sins. We are warned in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, when God through the Apostle Paul wrote; “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth & turn aside to myths.”

There are many false competing religions, faith systems and idols like consumerism around us. For example, count how often we hear the lie that we will be happy or deserve a product. It’s easy for even good things to become idols that separate us from Jesus. Important aspects of faith can become idols – just like with the Pharisees & Sadducees. Some some self

proclaimed Christians believe there are multiple ways to heaven and to God, besides believing in and following Jesus.

One sign of the end times is easy religion, pleasing religion and watering down the harsh sayings of Jesus. But our Isaiah and Psalms scriptures tell us, let's go to the house of the Lord. Let's praise the name of the Lord. That's where we find help to watch. That's where we find understanding of our times. Worship is where we find strength for right living and repentance. That's where we find the ability to be people of peace. Worship is where we find vision and hope.

Worship is an act of defiance toward a world that wants to wrap us in fear. Instead, let's choose Jesus. Let's tell others about Jesus. Let's be the hands and feet and mouths and thinking of Jesus. Let's help ourselves and others find their way in a world falling apart. Jim Wallis wrote, "What I discover again and again is that two things happen when people of faith actually *say and do* what their faith says they should say and do: First, people are surprised. Then they are attracted."

Isaiah 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: ²In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁵Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Psalms 122

¹I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." ²Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem. ³Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. ⁴That is where the tribes go up—the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel. ⁵There stand the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David. ⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May those who love you be secure. ⁷May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels." ⁸For the sake of my family & friends, I will say, "Peace be within you." ⁹For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.

Romans 13:11-14

¹¹And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing & drunken-

ness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, & do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Matthew 24:36-44 The Day & Hour Unknown

³⁶"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴²"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.