

#769 Judgment Day (Part 2)

As promised, here is Steve Albertin's sermon on Mark 13:1-8, which he introduced with the dramatic scene (still of unknown authorship) that we brought you [last week](#). In the sermon, Steve delves into the meaning of Jesus' prediction of a day when buildings will fall, and a time when nation will rise against nation.

Peace and Joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

"Judgment Day"

Mark 13:1-8

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In today's Gospel the disciples admire an immense, imposing, and enduring structure—the temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus did not share their admiration. Instead he said, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

In the next forty years, not only would the temple be destroyed, but Jesus' disciples would be harassed and persecuted. Many would lose their lives at the hands of their enemies. Their world would fall apart. Jesus' words would come true: "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines."

We look at our world and we wonder if anything has changed. We

sense that we too are on the brink of disaster.

I recently read a frightening description of what might happen in a nuclear attack that could devastate not only this country but much of the world. There would be an “incredible firestorm in which hundreds of tons of sooty smoke would absorb so much of the sun’s rays that only five percent of the normal amount of light would reach the earth...All land plants would be damaged or destroyed...The temperature would plummet for several months...All biological life on the planet would be gravely threatened.”

Such a description makes me shudder. I begin to wonder if the end of this world isn’t all that far away. It is easy to think of giving up.

But there is a strange irony in all of this. The supporters of nuclear weapons and its critics, the environmentalists and the disciples of big business, the hawks and the doves, the lovers of gas guzzlers and the lovers of hybrids, and all of us who worry about how we are going to make it to tomorrow, share one fundamental assumption. Our survival is all the matters.

That’s why Jesus’ words in today’s gospel are so unsettling: he says that it will all end, with wars, destruction, nation rising against nation.

But when? We want to know when, as if we could do anything about it.

The Romans destroyed the temple in A.D. 70. A few more centuries and the Roman Empire fell, but the world did not come to an end.

Was Jesus wrong?

The world has not come to an end. Judgment Day has not yet arrived. However, in a sense it has already has. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, God’s judgment on this sinful and

broken world came crashing down on God's very own Son and this whole sinful world he had chosen to love. On that dark Friday Jesus suffered Judgment Day for all of us. When he breathed his last painful breath, it looked like Jesus was doomed. It looked like his fate would be no different from the fate all of us must face when we have to meet our maker covered in the dirt of failure and shame.

However, Judgment Day was not over. God raised Jesus from the dead, God declared that God's love trumps God's judgment. Jesus is God's trump card offered to a world looking for hope when the only hand it is holding is a loser. When God raised Jesus, our Judgment Day was reversed. Through the promise of the gospel, God offers us the consequences of not our Judgment Day but Jesus' Judgment Day.

Therefore, just when it seems that all the cards are stacked against us, we have an ace in the hole. We are holding the ultimate trump card. We get to "euchre" all those who would do us in. The game is already over.

Ever since the day we were washed in the waters of the font, we died and rose with Christ. We already endured our last judgment. Drowned with Christ and raised to new life, the worst has already happened. The final judgment has already begun.

When we eat and drink the Lord's Supper, we already have a "foretaste of the feast to come." We eat and drink of Him for whom the Judgment Day has already happened. We already taste a fate he has won for us. We already get to live on the other side of Judgment Day.

Whenever that last day arrives and we breathe our last, whenever the world comes crashing to an end, we can be sure that the ultimate Judge of all people, places and things will look at us, clinging to His boy, and declare, "You are in!"

In those difficult times when the world seems to be falling apart, we can trust the promise of Christ confident of what our future will be. Our fate is no longer dependent on whether we can stop a terrorist attack, prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, halt global warming, pass the next test, have lots of friends, or defeat the dreaded disease within us.

Like Jesus' disciples we may be shaking in our shoes. But Jesus tells us, Do not be alarmed. We don't have to be afraid of tomorrow, of a nuclear holocaust or an environmental disaster or a fiscal cliff or a phone call at 3 a.m. or a pink slip or not having a date for the school dance or a letter of rejection. We already have experienced Judgment Day. For us the world has already ended. The worst has already happened. We have died—not alone, but with Christ. Whoever dies with him, will be raised with him. We don't have to worry about saving ourselves, our skins, our investments, our possessions, our reputations, or our pride. Christ already has.

Jesus compares it to the pangs of birth. When a mother begins the painful ordeal of childbirth, there are times when she feels defeated. The pain is too great. The suffering is too much. But what keeps her going is the promise of a new life. That promise gives her the strength to smile through the pain and endure the labor.

Right now it may look like our world is going to hell in a handbasket. The future may not look bright. Danger may seem to be around every corner. But we have the blessed assurance that the final outcome has already been determined. Judgment Day already happened when Jesus was crucified for us and rose again. On the cross Jesus suffered the final judgment for us.

That doesn't mean that we should throw in the towel on this world and give up. We can and should still work for justice and

fairness, for the environment, for a safer and cleaner society, because this is still God's world and through us God still loves it. But we can do it without fear, without living under the burden that it all depends on us. We know where it is all headed. We can be confident of tomorrow. We look forward to Judgment Day!