

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel, Year B

THE MERCIFUL APOCALYPSE

Mark 13:1-8

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Analysis by Ed Schroeder

Dear Crossings Readers: Here is a wonderful blast from the past, from our own Crossings Co-Founder and -Father, Ed Schroeder. Enjoy his ever-relevant analysis. Lori A. Cornell, Series Editor

Sabbatarians,

Mark's apocalypse is the linchpin between Jesus' final confrontation with the people of the temple (chapters 11 & 12) and the passion narrative (14 & 15). For us, as Church, that chapter is also the linchpin for our connection (or exposes our disconnection) with the Jesus of the Passion narratives.

Mark's entire Gospel proposes a theology of the Crucified Loser to a community perplexed and tempted to apostasy by virtue of their own experience of suffering and their own profiles as losers, not winners. The question(s) posed by the disciples in our Pentecost 26 text is no less uncomprehending than all their questions throughout the lectionary year. At best they show the disciples with blindness "half-healed," like the man in Mark 8, seeing humans as though they were "trees walking."



A Messiah for losers is the good news of Mark's Gospel. It surfaces especially in his 31 uses of the Greek term: *ochlos*, most often mistranslated as "crowd, throng, multitude." As Korean Minjung theologians from Korean SemineX have shown, *ochlos* in Mark is not a quantitative term, but a qualitative term: the crowded-out, the outsiders, the folks trashed by the operating systems of the old eon, both its churchly and its worldly systems.

Mark's proposal for Christians during the End Time is as follows: The End Time is any time that is "a time for confessing." If that is so, then there already have been many end times and very likely there will be more (many more?) before the actual "last" of the last days.

Christ's disciples survive the apocalypses of subsequent history by their faith connection to Jesus' own apocalypse unfolding in the passion narrative. In his soon-to-unfold passion Jesus will undergo judgment day. Good Friday is his Apocalypse Now. But in this apocalypse now God is offering a "merciful" judgment day to sinners. Such sinners, were they compelled to cope with that apocalyptic day on their own, would also be God-forsaken. By entrusting themselves to Jesus, such sinners become disciples. Since he endured God's proleptic apocalypse—in his own body on the tree—disciples are "home free" when subsequent ones come, and finally "already all the way home" when the last Last Day arrives.

The question from the faithful disciple is not “When WILL it be?” but “Is it Apocalypse NOW?” That constitutes the issue of watching or sleeping.

If it is such a time, the next question is: “Am I/are we on the witness stand, and if so, which Messiah am I/are we confessing?” That is the issue of being astray or being elect.

Then follows the act of confessing in the face of hatred, betrayal, or death sentences, all inflicted to intimidate the believers and stifle their confessing Christ on the witness stand. That is the issue of confessing or being ashamed of Christ with its corollary of his confessing or being ashamed of us at the Final Apocalypse.

In Mark 13 Jesus addresses the end-time problem of disciples—both then and now. Read the entire chapter before you proceed any further here.

The six stages of the Mark 13 matrix of 50 weeks ago were: Diagnosis: 1) Asleep, 2) Astray, and 3) Ashamed. Prognosis: 4) The Merciful Apocalypse in the Ochlos-Messiah (including an excursus on ochlos theology), 5) Spirited Confessing when it’s Apocalypse Now, and 6) Tending the Store by Gathering the Ochlos. [For the full matrix on the First Sunday of Advent text see the Crossings webpage: <https://crossings.org/text-study/1st-sunday-in-advent/> .]

1As [Jesus] came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” 2Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

3When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these

things are about to be accomplished?" 5Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 6Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. 7When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs."

DIAGNOSIS: Crucified Loser



Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Asleep

Christ's own disciples—then and now—are not immune to misreading reality: "What magnificent buildings!" Asking the wrong questions: "When will these things happen?"

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Astray

Worse than asking the wrong questions—as bad as that is—is to believe the wrong answers offered by false messiahs (v. 22) with their alternate interpretations of present history. Alternate in

the sense that the death and resurrection of the genuine Messiah are ignored or misread in interpreting what is happening and what is to come. Such deception detaches Christians from their Christ-connection and leaves them defenseless in facing their own apocalypse now. With the result that. . .

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Ashamed

The people are “awakened to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan.12:2, the first reading for Pentecost 26) as the apocalypse rolls over them. Their own lives and the world they occupy are left “not one stone on another...all thrown down.” Without Christ it is not only the creaturely constituent components of such lives that crumble. They also crumble before God’s seat of judgment in the “real” (not “shadow”) house of God—ala the day’s second reading from Hebrews 10.

PROGNOSIS: A Messiah for Losers

The saving effect of Jesus’ own apocalypse for those crumbled in Step 3, an apocalypse “ahead of time” (Mark 13:23) will soon unfold in his passion. Its validity, even against God’s own judgment of sinners, “will not pass away” (v. 31). That is what makes Jesus the “true” Christ in comparison with all “false” ones. His “word” about us is valid before the Judge of the Supreme Court. In Jesus, God has “cut short the days” of his critical apocalypse or else “no one would survive” (v. 20). But that cutting short saves the elect.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Spirited Confessing at Apocalypse Now

“Watching out . . . being on guard . . . standing firm . . . not believing the false prophets and false Christs . . . keeping watch.” All of these signal what faith is in Mark’s Gospel: locking in on and trusting the word from Jesus, as the Word that

will not pass away. Faith is to do these things in the face of all other evidence, all other “words” to the contrary, even from God!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Tending the Store by Gathering the Ochlos (13:34)

We ready ourselves to relinquish everything, “house, goods, fame, child and spouse”—as some of us sang a few days ago (on Reformation Sunday)—when the moment calls for it (vv. 15 & 16). We gather other ochlos to Christ from wherever “the four winds” have scattered them. We do not “sleep,” nor are we “alarmed” as apocalypses unroll, but “saying and doing” what Christ wants said and done on all the witness stands where he places us, we care for others so that “the days be cut short” and they be added to “the elect.”