



**TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**MARK 13: 1-8**  
**NOVEMBER 18, 2018**  
**“YOU PAYS YOUR MONEY AND YOU MAKES YOUR CHOICE”**

**MARK 13: 1-8**

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As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”

“Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.”

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

**SERMON**

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ON A ROAD THROUGH A DESERT IN ARIZONA, AN EVANGELIST NAMED NATE EVANS PREACHED TO THE PEOPLE WHO ROARED PAST IN THEIR CARS, “REPENT, THE END OF THE WORLD IS NEAR!”

ONE DAY, BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, HE CAME TO A BIG LEVER IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE. OVER IT HUNG A SIGN, “PULL THIS TO END THE WORLD.”



NATE SAW THIS AS THE PERFECT PLACE TO PREACH AND SOON COUNTLESS PEOPLE WERE STOPPING TO HEAR NATE PREACH BY THE LEVER. IN FACT, THERE WERE SO MANY CARS PARKED NEARBY THAT THE ROAD WAS NEARLY BLOCKED.

SUDDENLY, AN EIGHTEEN-WHEELER CAME DOWN THE HIGHWAY AND COULDN'T STOP IN TIME. THE DRIVER HAD A CHOICE. RUN OVER NATE OR RUN OVER THE LEVER.

AS THE DRIVER LATER EXPLAINED TO THE HIGHWAY PATROLMAN, HE HAD NO CHOICE. POINTING TO THE SMEAR ON THE ROAD THAT USED TO BE THE EVANGELIST NATE EVANS, HE SAID, "BETTER NATE THAN LEVER...."

THE CHURCH FOLLOWS A DIFFERENT YEARLY CYCLE—WHAT WE CALL THE LITURGICAL CALENDAR—AND OURS COMES TO AN END NEXT SUNDAY. THIS IS WHY WE HAVE A GOSPEL READING THIS MORNING ABOUT ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS.

AND JESUS HAS A WARNING, "WATCH OUT!"

IN TWO WEEKS, THEN, WE BEGIN A NEW CHURCH YEAR WITH THE SEASON OF ADVENT. AND THE THEME OF ADVENT IS "WAKE UP!"

WITH ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS, WE GOTTA WATCH OUT AND WAKE UP!

LIFE SNEAKS UP ON US. I GO TO BED ONE NIGHT FEELING FINE AND WAKE UP IN THE MORNING WITH THE MOST SEVERE PAIN I HAVE EVER FELT IN MY LIFE. TURNS OUT IT IS A KIDNEY STONE.

WATCH OUT AND IT WOKE ME UP! LIFE CHANGES OVERNIGHT.

DEB WALKED AROUND WITH A BAD HIP JOINT FOR YEARS. I DON'T KNOW HOW SHE DID IT. PAIN DURING THE DAY. PAIN DURING THE NIGHT. AND THEN, IN ONE DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT, SUDDENLY SURGERY IS SCHEDULED.

LIFE CHANGES IN ONE APPOINTMENT.

ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS.



WITH THIS DUAL ADMONITION—WATCH OUT AND WAKE UP—JESUS, AS DO OTHER SPIRITUAL TEACHERS—ATTEMPTS TO BRING OUR ATTENTION TO THE **NOW**.

AS I’VE MENTIONED BEFORE, THE SPIRITUALLY UNDISCIPLINED MIND GOES TWO PLACES. AND SOMETIMES BOUNCES BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN THE TWO.

THE MIND HEADS INTO THE PAST: COULDA, SHOULDA, WOULD. GUILT AND SHAME.

“IF I HADN’T DONE THIS. WHY DID I DO THAT? IF I COULD ONLY UNDO THAT DECISION. WHAT WAS I THINKING?”

THIS IS WHERE WE SIT IN DEPRESSION AND A POOR SELF-IMAGE. GOD DOESN’T WANT THIS FOR US.

OR WE HEAD INTO THE FUTURE. “LET’S SEE, IF THIS HAPPENS AND THEN THAT HAPPENS, THEN THIS MIGHT HAPPEN AND THEN I WON’T BE ABLE TO HANDLE IT.” WE’RE A HUNDRED MILES DOWN OUR IMAGINARY ROAD AND OUT OF OUR MINDS WITH ANXIETY. GOD DOESN’T WANT THIS FOR US.

IN THIS REGARD, JESUS PAINTS A RATHER DIRE PICTURE IN OUR GOSPEL. THE TEMPLE—THE CENTER OF WORSHIP FOR THE JEWS—IS GOING TO BE DISMANTLED, STONE BY STONE. IMPENDING DISASTERS ARE AROUND THE CORNER—EARTHQUAKES, WARS, FAMINE.

WOW. MAYBE WE COULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING TO PREVENT ALL THIS, RIGHT? AREN’T WE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WORLD? GUILT, SHAME, DEPRESSION.

WOW. I’M NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO HANDLE ALL THAT CHAOS AND CHANGE THAT JESUS IS TALKING ABOUT. WHAT IF THE WORLD ENDS? FEAR AND ANXIETY. AREN’T I SUPPOSED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS?

YES, WATCH OUT AND WAKE UP. STAY IN THIS MOMENT. IN THIS MOMENT, THE TEMPLE ISN’T FALLING AND THE EARTH ISN’T SHAKING AND THERE’S FOOD ON THE TABLE. TRUST GOD AND TRUST YOURSELF....



LIFE IS BIGGER THAN WE ARE. IT JUST KEEPS COMING AT US. THERE IS NO HALFTIME WHEN WE GO INTO THE LOCKER ROOM TO GET OUR ANKLE TAPED, EAT SOME PAIN PILLS, AND DRINK GATORADE.

BUT WE CAN WATCH OUT AND WAKE UP AND STAY IN THIS MOMENT. INSTEAD, **WE USUALLY TRY TO CONTROL WHAT WE CAN'T AND DON'T CONTROL WHAT WE CAN.**

**WE USUALLY TRY TO CONTROL WHAT WE CAN'T AND DON'T CONTROL WHAT WE CAN....**

FOR THE LAST FEW WEEKS, I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRACTICE WHAT I AM PREACHING.

EVEN PRIOR TO THE FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT CONCERNING THE MOTION TO CALL ME AS PASTOR, I WAS HAVING TO WATCH OUT AND WAKE UP BECAUSE THE PERSONAL ATTACKS HAD ALREADY STARTED.

ATTACKS BEHIND MY BACK, PUBLIC CRITICISM, BIZARRE RUMORS, THINLY VEILED FACEBOOK POSTS AND MEMES, AND THE INEVITABLE EMAIL AND PHONE CALLS TO THE BISHOP. WE'RE BECOMING BEST BUDS. HE HAS ME ON SPEED DIAL.

THERE WAS THE PULL TO THE PAST. WHAT COULD I HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY? SHOULD I HAVE TRIED TO CORRECT THIS MISPERCEPTION OR THAT MISUNDERSTANDING? WHY WASN'T I ON FACEBOOK SO I COULD RESPOND TO THE ATTACKERS? I COULD GET DEPRESSED.

BUT NO, I BROUGHT MYSELF BACK TO THIS MOMENT. I HAVE NO CONTROL OVER OTHER PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS, THEIR PERSONAL AGENDAS, OR THEIR WORDS AND ACTIONS. PEOPLE GONNA DO WHAT THEY GONNA DO. AND FRANKLY, THESE THINGS SAY MORE ABOUT THE PEOPLE SAYING THEM THAN IT DOES ABOUT ME.

OR I COULD HAVE SAILED INTO THE FUTURE. WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN? HOW ARE PEOPLE GOING TO VOTE? HOW WILL IT AFFECT THE CONGREGATION IF IT IS A NEGATIVE VOTE? WHAT WILL DEB AND I DO IF IT'S A NEGATIVE VOTE? I COULD GET ANXIOUS.



BUT NO, I BROUGHT MYSELF BACK TO THIS MOMENT. TAKING CARE OF WHAT WAS IN FRONT OF ME. WRITING A SERMON, FINDING A SONG, WALKING THE DOGS, MAKING SURE WE GET ED ON BOARD, SEEING WHAT I COULD DO FOR WENDY AND THE CHOIR, FOCUSING ON THE PERSON I’M TALKING WITH IN MY OFFICE, DOING THE NEXT RIGHT THING.

TOMORROW HAS NO MORE EXISTENCE THAN YESTERDAY, BUT WE CAN ALWAYS CONTROL **NOW**. **AND WE ALL LIVE IN A SERIES OF NOWS...**

THE GOSPEL SUBTLY ADDRESSES THIS ISSUE OF NOW AND WHERE WE SPEND OUR TIME.

A BIBLE STUDY GROUP WAS DISCUSSING TIME AND THE ISSUE OF DEATH. THE LEADER SAID, “WE WILL ALL DIE ONE DAY AND NONE OF US KNOWS WHEN, BUT IF YOU KNEW YOU HAD ONLY FOUR WEEKS TO LIVE, HOW WOULD YOU SPEND YOUR TIME?”

ONE MAN SAID, “I WOULD GO INTO MY COMMUNITY AND SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH THOSE WHO DON’T KNOW THE GOOD NEWS.”

THEY ALL AGREED THAT WAS QUITE COMMENDABLE.

ONE WOMAN REPLIED, “I WOULD DEDICATE MY TIME TO SERVING GOD, MY FAMILY, AND MY CHURCH.”

AND, AGAIN, THEY ALL AGREED THIS WOULD BE A WONDERFUL WAY TO SPEND HER LAST FOUR WEEKS.

AND THEN A GUY PIPED UP, “I WOULD GO TO MY MOTHER-IN-LAW’S HOUSE.”

EVERYONE WAS PUZZLED, SO THE GROUP LEADER ASKED, “WHY YOUR MOTHER-IN-LAW’S HOUSE?”

“BECAUSE IT WOULD BE THE LONGEST FOUR WEEKS OF MY LIFE.”

WHERE AND HOW DO WE SPEND OUR TIME? MOST PEOPLE, INCLUDING ME, CAN SPEND A WHOLE HECK-OF-A-LOT OF TIME IN OUR HEADS.

WHY DO YOU THINK WE HAVE THIS ADMONITION TO “KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME?” BECAUSE MOST OF US AREN’T IN THE GAME, WE’RE IN OUR HEADS.



AA HAS A SAYING, “AN ADDICT SHOULDN’T GO INTO HIS OR HER HEAD WITHOUT AN ESCORT.”

AND WE’RE ALL ADDICTED TO OUR OWN BRAND OF “STINKIN’ THINKIN.” WHAT THE BUDDHISTS CALL “MONKEY MIND.” LIKE A MONEY SWINGING FROM BRANCH TO BRANCH, THE MIND GOES FROM THOUGHT TO FEELING TO FEAR TO OUR LATEST IMAGINARY STORY LINE TO OUR CRAZY IDEA TO OUR DISTORTED THOUGHT TO OUR MISPERCEPTION.

OR WE TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHY SOMEONE DID WHAT HE DID OR WHAT SHE DID SHE MEAN BY WHAT SHE SAID.

**BUT, WHEN I’M IN YOUR HEAD, I’M OUT OF MY MIND....**

WHAT IS THE NOW?

IN ONE OF THE HARRY POTTER BOOKS, DUMBLEDORE SAYS, “THE TIME HAS COME TO CHOOSE BETWEEN WHAT IS RIGHT AND WHAT IS EASY.”

CLC WILL CHANGE. METAPHORICALLY, THE TEMPLE THAT HAS BEEN BUILT WILL FALL. I WILL BE CALLED AS PASTOR AND SOME PEOPLE WILL LEAVE AND WE WILL CONTINUE OUR PROCESS OF TRANSFORMING CLC.

CLC WILL CHANGE. METAPHORICALLY, THE TEMPLE THAT HAS BEEN BUILT WILL FALL. I WON’T BE CALLED AS PASTOR AND SOME PEOPLE WILL LEAVE AND YOU WILL GO BACK TO THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE.

JESUS SAYS, “READ THE SIGNS....”

WATCH OUT AND WAKE UP!

BISHOP KUSSEROW AND I BOTH VALUE THE INSIGHTS OF EDWIN FRIEDMAN, WHOSE LAST BOOK WAS ENTITLED, **A FAILURE OF NERVE: LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF THE QUICK-FIX.**

AT ONE POINT, FRIEDMAN OUTLINES THE MAJOR PRINCIPLES OF BEING A LEADER:

**SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT GET CAUGHT UP IN THE EMOTIONAL WHIRLWINDS AROUND HIM**



**THE CAPACITY TO BE CLEAR ABOUT ONE'S PRINCIPLES AND VISION**

**THE WILLINGNESS TO BE EXPOSED AND VULNERABLE**

**PERSISTENCE IN THE FACE OF THE INEVITABLE RESISTANCE**

**REMAINING CALM IN THE FACE OF REACTIVE SABOTAGE**

PLEASE NOTICE. A LEADER IS NOT DEFINED AS EVERYBODY'S BEST FRIEND, A NICE GUY, SOMEONE WHO KEEPS EVERYBODY HAPPY, SOMEONE WHO LETS PEOPLE RUN THEIR OWN SHOW WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

INSTEAD, I CLEARLY HAVE LAID OUT A VISION, WHICH LEAVES ME VULNERABLE. I HAVE CALMLY CONTINUED IN THE FACE OF RESISTANCE AND SABOTAGE, AND I HAVE NOT GOTTEN CAUGHT UP IN THE EMOTIONAL WHIRLWINDS AROUND ME AND REALLY, IF YOU REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT I AM ABOUT AS A LEADER, IT IS NOT ABOUT ME. THAT'S TOO EASY. AND IT'S NOT RIGHT. IT'S ABOUT THE LEADERS WE HAVE BROUGHT TOGETHER AS A TEAM: RHEBA. STEVE. MO. AARON. SHERRIE. PAT. MICHELLE. SHAREEN WITH THE WEBSITE. AND AARON IS ALREADY POISED TO BE OUR YOUTH MINISTER.

IT'S ABOUT ALL OF YOU. AND WHAT EACH OF YOU BRING TO THE TABLE. AND WHAT YOU WANT CLC TO BE. WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE IN FIVE YEARS? EVEN HEALTHIER AND STRONGER THAN WHAT WE ARE TODAY?

OR BACK TO WHERE YOU WERE A SHORT TIME AGO? THIRTY PEOPLE WORSHIPING AT THE 8:00 AM SERVICE....

SOME DON'T LIKE IT WHEN I TELL THE TRUTH, BUT WHEN I ARRIVED THIS PLACE WAS ON THE WAY OUT. AND TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AS A PASTORAL PSYCHOTHERAPIST HAS TAUGHT ME THAT NO ONE CAN GET WELL UNTIL THEY FULLY FACE WHAT ISN'T WORKING. I'VE TRIED TO HELP YOU FACE THAT. AND AGAIN, SOME DON'T LIKE FACING IT.

BUT, I HAVE NO CONTROL OVER THOSE WHO CAN'T FACE THIS AND ACCEPT THIS. AND, **NOW**, SEE THE SIGNS ALL AROUND US. WE'RE ON THE WAY UP.

**WE'RE ON THE WAY UP!**



WATCH OUT AND WAKE UP!

WAKE UP AND WATCH OUT!

CLC'S PAST AND FUTURE IS BEFORE YOU IN THIS NOW....

DEB AND I WANT TO BE HERE.

I CAME HOME A COUPLE WEEKS AGO FROM SEEING SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION IN VARIOUS APPOINTMENTS. I WALKED IN THE HOUSE AND THE FIRST WORDS OUT OF MY MOUTH WERE, "I LOVE THESE PEOPLE."

AND DEB RESPONDED, "I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER HEARD YOU SAY THAT BEFORE."

WE WANT TO BE HERE, BUT ONLY IF YOU WANT US HERE.

ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS....

MY EXAMPLE OF BEING A PASTOR IS MY PASTOR GROWING UP, PASTOR LEOPOLD BERNHARD. WHO, IN THE EARLY 1960S WHEN THE CHURCH WAS IN AN INCREASING BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD, PREACHED THAT THESE ARE OUR BLACK BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL COMPELS US TO OPEN OUR DOORS TO THEM. AND MOST OF THE WHITE MEMBERS FLED TO CHURCHES IN THE SUBURBS. IT WAS NOT THE EASY CHOICE, BUT IT WAS THE RIGHT CHOICE....

I READ RECENTLY THAT OVER THE DOOR TO THE STEELERS LOCKER ROOM IS A SIGN, "THE STANDARD IS THE STANDARD."

THE STANDARD IS THE STANDARD.

I AM NOT A TRADITIONAL PASTOR. BUT I AM OLD SCHOOL. THE STANDARD IS THE STANDARD. YOU DO IT RIGHT. YOU DO IT WELL. YOU DO IT TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY. OR YOU DON'T DO IT. IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BE THAT KIND OF CHURCH, DON'T VOTE FOR ME.

ANYONE CAN DO IT POORLY. OR AS MY FATHER WOULD SAY, IN A "SLOPHAUNTZ" WAY.

WATCH OUT AND WAKE UP....

IT WAS THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR AND ALL THE STUDENTS WERE BRINGING PRESENTS FOR THEIR TEACHER. A FLORIST'S DAUGHTER CAME UP AND GAVE HER





TEACHER A BOX. THE TEACHER SAID, "I BET THESE ARE FLOWERS!" THE GIRL REPLIED, "HOW DID YOU KNOW?"

"JUST A LUCKY GUESS."

NEXT, A BOY WHOSE FAMILY OWNED A CANDY STORE CAME UP AND GAVE THE TEACHER A BOX. SHE SAID SHE KNEW IT MUST BE CANDY. WHEN THE BOY ASKED HER HOW SHE KNEW, SHE AGAIN SAID, "JUST A LUCKY GUESS."

FINALLY, A BOY WHOSE FATHER OWNED A LIQUOR STORE CAME UP AND GAVE HER A BOX, BUT ONE OF THE BOX'S CORNERS WAS LEAKING A LITTLE.

THE TEACHER TOUCHED THE LEAK AND PUT IT TO HER TONGUE, "IS IT WINE?" THE BOY SHOOK HIS HEAD NO.

SHE TOUCHED THE LEAK AND PUT IT TO HER TONGUE, "IT IS CHAMPAGNE?" THE BOY SAID NO.

FINALLY, SHE GAVE UP AND ASKED HIM WHAT WAS IN THE BOX. WITH A BIG SMILE ON HIS FACE, HE EXCLAIMED, "IT'S A PUPPY!"

WATCH OUT AND WAKE UP!

...YOU KNOW BY NOW THAT I COME FROM A LINE OF CARNEYS. ONE OF THE SAYINGS OF THE CARNIVAL WORKERS WHO RAN THE GAMES OF CHANCE WAS, "YOU PAYS YOUR MONEY AND YOU MAKES YOUR CHOICE."

## **SERMON SONG**

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**LAST OF MY KIND** BY JASON ISBELL