

“When it Feels like the End of the World”

Malachi 4:1-2a, Luke 21:5-19

Rev. Joy Laughridge

November 16, 2025

When I was a teenager there was a popular song by the alternative rock band R.E.M. called “It’s the End of the World as We Know It (and I Feel Fine).” I did not know until Stan Pilinski sent me an email to tell me that today is the 38th anniversary of the song’s release date so, thank you Stan for that timely bit of music trivia. If you know the song you know that the lyrics are fast and hard to understand except for a few easy to distinguish words and phrases here and there, maybe the most famous being the name, “Leonard Bernstien!” And, of course, everyone could sing along with the words to the chorus. “It’s the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine.”

I thought of this song when I read the Gospel passage earlier this week, and I also thought of a meme that I saw several weeks ago that referenced the song. It said, “R.E.M. gave me unrealistic expectations for how I would feel at the end of the world as we know it.” That meme made me laugh, but it also captures what a lot of people seem to be feeling these days. It feels like the world as we know it is ending, and for a lot of people that doesn’t feel fine. Well, on the 38th anniversary of the release of R.E.M.’s song we find ourselves listening to Jesus in Luke’s Gospel talking about the end of the world, and though he doesn’t gloss over or leave out the uncomfortable parts, in his word we do find help and encouragement for the living of every day until he comes. Let’s listen to the Scripture.

⁵When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown

down.”⁷ They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?”⁸ And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them.”⁹ “When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.”¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹ there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues, and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.¹² “But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³ This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴ So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, ¹⁵ for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your souls.

In these verses, we hear Jesus using apocalyptic language, especially in verses 10 and 11 when he talks about earthquakes, and plagues, and dreadful portents, and if we had kept reading, you would see that there is even more of that kind of language. Its language that shows that Jesus was pointing ahead to the end of the age in the ultimate sense. The day of final judgement and the restoration of Creation are on the way, but Jesus was also talking about a nearer ending that would occur before the arrival of that day.

The nearer ending would be a time that his disciples would experience in their own lifetimes, and in that time, it would feel like

their world was being turned upside down. Within a generation, in the year 70, the Romans put down a Jewish revolt and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and in the years leading up to that catastrophe, Jesus's followers experienced exactly the kind of trials he describes here in Luke. The book of Acts tells of arrests, and persecutions, and tribulations that the apostles and early Christians endured as they tried to remain faithful in a time that felt like the end of everything. As they were living through these times, the early Christians did believe that Jesus's return was imminent. They believed that they were living in the last days, but from our vantage point in history, we can see that what felt like the end of the world wasn't quite the end of the world yet.

In one sense, the early church wasn't wrong to think that they were living in the last times. In a real sense, all the days between Jesus's ascension and his second coming can be understood as the last days. We're never given a number so we can count down to the day when Jesus returns, but, like the early Christians, when we observe things that look like the signs of the end of the age that Jesus talked about- the wars, and plagues, and earthquakes - we tend to think that the ultimate end must be just around the corner. There is nothing wrong with hoping that the return of Jesus is imminent. We *should* look for and hope for his coming, but it is also good to be prepared to endure if it turns out that we're living through a time that only *feels* like we have come to the end of the world. In those times, we need to know that God holds the future securely and that a new day is coming, but we *also* need to know how to keep going while we wait.

Part of being prepared to endure is knowing what to expect which is why Jesus talked about what was coming in the days ahead. He wasn't trying to scare his disciples. He was just being straightforward so that they, and we, would know what to expect.

Jesus did give a few specific details. He told them that the Temple would be destroyed, but we don't always get all the details about what's going to happen next. What Jesus *does* tell us is that while we live in a world in which the rules and rulers of the world are opposed to God and the will of God, those who have aligned themselves with God can expect to face opposition. This is what Jesus experienced, and his followers who are faithful to continue carrying his message and living out the values of his kingdom can expect the same. This is why Jesus says in John 15:18-20, ***“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.²⁰ Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”***

Knowing in advance that being friends with God will put us in conflict with the rule and rulers of this age is part of being prepared to endure when we are living in times that feel dark, disordered, or like “the end of the world as we know it,” but Jesus also said something else that was important for his disciples. He told them that when they endured persecution that those would be the times when they would have the opportunity to testify about him. Again, in the book of Acts, we can read about times when this was exactly what happened. The apostles recognized that the confrontations with authorities were chances to proclaim the gospel of Jesus, and in Acts 5 it says, “they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.” They weren't happy about the suffering itself, but they embraced and thanked God for the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus that came through the resistance that they faced.

When we see and experience opposition to God and God's will that's happening around us in whatever forms we may encounter it,

our first instinct may not be to embrace the resistance as a chance to speak up and be faithful witnesses to Jesus and his kingdom. When we encounter resistance because we are trying to live as faithful followers of Jesus, that's when we may feel tempted to despair, or to give up on our faith, or to abandon our own allegiance to Jesus, but Jesus urges us to see those situations with new eyes and perspective. They are moments or seasons of hardship and difficulty, yes, but they are moments or seasons that God intends to redeem and use to accomplish God's good purpose.

As Jesus talked to his disciples about this future that he assured them would be fraught with challenges and hardships, he also made promises and they are promises that are for us, too. Jesus promised that he would empower them and give them the words and wisdom that they would need to be his witnesses. He would supply what they needed, and he promised that through their endurance they would gain their souls. Truly, it is only through enduring faith in Jesus that we gain our lives because true life is only found in Jesus. The world and the powers that rage against Jesus and persist in rebellion against God promise that life can be attained through greed, and power, and selfish ambition, but Jesus exposes these promises as the lies that they are and offers true and everlasting life to all who turn away from the destructive lies of this age and find hope in him. In every season that feels like an ending, he is the One who sustains us, strengthens us, and makes our witness possible.

Today if you feel like the person who said REM gave me unrealistic expectations about how I would feel at the end of the world as we know it: hear the good news. Even when everything is falling apart, it is possible to say with Michael Stipe, "I feel fine." To say it doesn't mean we're ok with bad things that are going on, and it doesn't mean that we're giving up on the hope of a better world and accepting the status quo. What it means, in light of the word

proclaimed to us today, is that we are fine because we know we aren't fighting the good fight alone or in our own strength. We are fine because in adversity, God gives us chances to be Jesus's witnesses and promises to empower us with the words and wisdom we need. And we are fine because when the last day does finally come, these dark days won't have the last word. Jesus will, and he will make all things new. Amen.