

**PENTECOST 26B – 11/18/18**  
***Living on the EVE OF DESTRUCTION***  
**(Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:23-25; Mark 13:1-8)**

In June of 1965, immediately following the end of my third grade school year, our family moved here to Freehold from Livingston up in Essex County. We were accompanied on this move by my Aunt Ruth (my mom's sister) and her family as well who, at the time, lived not far from us in Colonia; a section of Woodbridge Township in Middlesex County.

Like many in the mid-60's, our two families were escaping the more-crowded and urban part of the state for a less-crowded, more rural area; specifically the horse country of Monmouth County. We both had new homes built – side-by-side, as a matter of fact – in a brand-new housing development located right off of Schanck Road on what had previously been farmland. During that time a good many “land-rich” but “cash-poor” farmers apparently made our pretty well selling their land to developers in this way.

Since we were both committed to selling our current homes and then making this move once school let out, my Uncle John Hudak had the good sense and foresight to ask the builder what would happen if our homes down here were not finished on time. The builder, of course, assured him and my aunt, and my folks as well, that this would not be an issue since he was *guaranteeing* that they would be ready for us on schedule. But, again, my uncle had the good sense to press the builder on this, to the point where the builder – just to get my uncle off his back, I'm sure – told them that if both homes were *not* finished on time, then we could live rent-free in one of his model homes until they *were* finished; all we had to pay for would be the utilities. “Fair enough,” my uncle said, so a deal was struck.

Well, June rolled around. We had both sold our homes and were now ready to move once school was out. And guess what? Our new homes here in Freehold Township were *not* finished. But, true to his word, the

builder let us live in one of his model homes. *One* of his homes, that is. In other words, our family of five (which included my grandmother, my mom and aunt's mother) plus my aunt's family of four – or *nine* people altogether – had to cram into a single home! Luckily, it was a rather large five-bedroom ranch. But even so, imagine two sets of everything – especially furniture – being squeezed into one *single-family* house!

I was nine years old at the time and, boy, I thought that this was pretty neat! The adults had much different feelings, I'm sure.

And we then lived together like this until January of 1966, or for approximately seven months. It was a logistical nightmare and, if we had time, I could tell you some horror stories, and some funny ones as well; especially about how our two families had to share a single kitchen, not to mention just two bathrooms!

But my *reason* for telling you this is that it gave me a chance to be around my two older cousins whom I idolized; my cousin Luke who was around 13 at the time, and my cousin Edie who was probably 15 or 16. Luke, who was about as cool as Steve McQueen (in my estimation at least) was my hero, of course. But it was my cousin Edie who gave me my first real introduction *to* and education *about* pop music. Like many teenage girls, then as well as now, she knew all the hits, all the top artists, and she played her radio and her records endlessly. (Of course, this was in that ancient time *before* iPods and CD's and now iTunes.)

And if you were around in 1965, and under the age of 30, you will undoubtedly recall that it was an *awesome* year for pop music. For instance, 1965 was the year that the Rolling Stones recorded "I Can't Get No Satisfaction"; the Beatles charted with "Help!", "Ticket To Ride", and "Eight Days A Week"; the Temptations had "My Girl"; The Righteous Brothers sang "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" as well as "Unchained Melody"; Sonny and Cher collaborated on "I Got You Babe"; the Beach Boys had "Help Me, Rhonda" and "California Girls"; and the Supremes sang "Back In My Arms Again" just to name... a few.

And since I had a teenage cousin who played these hit songs over and over and over again, to this day I probably know more about the top, hit songs of 1965 than any other year, *before or since!* Hands down.

So, interestingly enough, it was one of these hit songs from 1965 that immediately popped into my mind the very first moment I read this morning's Gospel. Recorded in July of that year by a gravelly-voiced singer named Barry McGuire it rose to #1 in the country on September 25<sup>th</sup>, replacing "Help!" by the Beatles.

The name of this song was "Eve of Destruction," and it was one of the early anti-war protest songs, long before it became fashionable or even permissible to speak out against Vietnam. But "Eve of Destruction" was not *just* about the Vietnam War, despite what critics first thought. The '60's, if you're old enough to remember, was a *tumultuous* decade filled with apocalyptic fears and doomsday predictions. Besides Vietnam – 1965 was the year, you may recall, when we saw the first massive troop build-up in Vietnam – this was also when the Cold War with the Soviet Union was *also* at its height. Moreover, it was only two years removed from 1963, the year that JFK was assassinated, and there was also tremendous social unrest over the entire Civil Rights movement that had culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well.

And then, *following* 1965, you had riots in many of our major cities, the protests across college campuses – culminating with the tragic shootings at Kent State in 1970. There was also the meltdown at the 1968 Democratic Party Convention and, earlier that same year, two more assassinations: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Kennedy's own brother Bobby. At times, as our entire society seemed to be teetering on the edge, and quickly unraveling before our very eyes, it certainly *appeared* as if the end of the world was at hand; that we were indeed living in the last days and, therefore, on the "*eve* of destruction."

Again, I was just a kid at the time. But it was a scary time, even for kids; maybe *especially* for kids. In fact, I still vividly remember another

iconic moment from that era: the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962, for instance. We were still in Livingston at the time, and there was actually a missile base located on the other side of town, armed with Ajax and Hercules missiles (and here you probably thought that they were only out there in North Dakota somewhere, but we actually had ‘em here in New Jersey as well!). So there was a very real fear that if a nuclear Armageddon were to be suddenly touched off – that good ole Livingston was probably going to be directly targeted by some Russian ICBM’s!

I was in the first grade that year, an impressionable age, and – as I say – still have vivid, almost haunting, memories of air-raid drills, using the same warning siren that they use out in the Midwest for tornados. The teachers would make us all climb underneath our desks and sit on the floor, putting our heads between our knees, *as if this would somehow help if a nuclear warhead actually detonated in our vicinity!* When I think back on that whole experience *now*, the only thing that sitting on the floor underneath our desks would have accomplished is that there would have been nice, neat piles of ashes left over for the custodians to sweep up a few hundred – or a few *thousand* – years later!

And so what I mostly remember about the 1960’s was that it was a very scary time, especially for a kid; a stressful and unsettling time when our country and the old ways were being challenged and broken down, and a new country and new ways were emerging.

“The eastern world, it is explodin’; Violence flarin’, bullets loadin’ is the way the song “Eve Of Destruction” opened. And then came the refrain, “But you tell me over and over and over again, my friend... ah, you don’t believe we’re on the eve of destruction.” The point here, of course, was that everything going on around us at that time: the war in southeast Asia, violence and civil unrest breaking out across our country, the threat of nuclear annihilation, all these were obvious *signs* – surely to any sane person at least – that we were perhaps living in the end times...

And that's precisely what Jesus' disciples in today's Gospel apparently thought as well, isn't it? Here was the promised Messiah, and all the prophecies and predictions that went along with him. Moreover, Jesus himself has just said, regarding the temple in Jerusalem, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left... (they) will all be thrown down."

And so, later, while Jesus was sitting across from the temple on the Mount of Olives with his inner circle of Peter, James, John, and Andrew, they asked him privately, "Tell us (Jesus), when will this be, and what will be the *sign* that all these things are about to be accomplished?"

There seems to have been, just as there was back in 1965 and in *every* time throughout history, including ours today as well, a *need*, a *desire*, if you will, to know about, or to predict, the end times. And every generation throughout history has then also *thought* and *believed* that they were indeed *living* in the last days. Look at what Jesus says, "For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines." Every generation, in other words, *has experienced* or *will experience* all of these things!

When the plague, the so-called "Black Death," swept across Europe in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century killing 75 to 100 million people, and somewhere between 30 and 60 percent of Europe's entire population was wiped out, the people of *that* day surely thought to themselves, "We must be living in the end times!" And Martin Luther, himself, who lived more than a hundred years later, but at a time when that same plague was still around, and the Islamic Turks were banging on the doors of Christian Europe as well, likewise thought the very same thing.

And, flashing forward to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Spanish Flu killed 50-100 million people worldwide from 1918-1920 *that* generation

probably thought the same thing as well. As did those who lived through the Second World War when somewhere between 60 and 80 million died. Then there was the Cold War and the build-up of atomic and nuclear weapons, the threat of a nuclear winter, and the unprecedented concept of “MAD” or “mutually assured destruction.”

And now, in recent years, there has been the AIDS pandemic (well over 25 million worldwide have died just since 1981), and the threat of some virulent new flu strain or some unstoppable virus like Ebola. Or effects of climate change, the melting of the earth’s glaciers and polar ice caps, and the corresponding changes in our environment including the extinction of millions of plant and animal species; and perhaps even those worse-than-usual wild fires out in California or the devastating hurricanes of the past few years. Not to mention the two wars we’re still fighting in the Middle East, the memory of 9/11 and the threat of fanatical terrorists, or a worldwide financial meltdown like the one we nearly had 10 years ago, or the breakdown of civil discourse and the advent of tribalism in our political arena!

Barry McGuire, now 83 years old and a Christian by the way, still goes around singing “Eve Of Destruction” often changing the words to reflect these new threats, and also prefacing his performances with the sobering reminder that the song is just as valid today as it was back then, maybe even more so. “The eastern world, it is explodin’; Violence flarin’, bullets loadin’...” Or as he sings in the second verse, “Don’t you understand what I’m tryin’ to say; Can’t you feel the fears I’m feelin’ today?” And from the third verse, “When human respect is disintegratin’; This whole crazy world is just too frustratin’... And you tell me over and over and over again, my friend... you don’t believe we’re on the eve of destruction (?)”

Well maybe we are... and maybe we aren’t. But, either way, we need to know how to deal with it; to deal with these scary and unsettling times. In other words, how *does* one live on the eve of destruction, if that in fact is what we’re now facing? Well, it’s really quite simple actually.

Surprisingly so. And our three lessons this morning have some very helpful, practical, and *hopeful* things to say to us...

First, says Jesus, “Beware that no one leads you astray.” The Greek word translated as “beware” here literally means “see” or “watch.” But the idea is “watch out!” Why? Because many will come in my name, he says, and they will try to lead you *away* from the “right” or “correct” path. Just as every generation believes that *it* is living in the last days, every generation also has charlatans who will try to convince them (or us) that they actually *know* how and when this will all take place. But they really don’t.

So don’t listen to them, says Jesus. In fact, a little later in Mark 13, verse 32 in fact, Jesus says, “But about that day or hour *no one* knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son (meaning Jesus himself), but *only* the Father.”

First, beware that no one leads you astray. Second, “when you *hear* of wars and rumors of wars,” says Jesus, “do not be alarmed.” In other words, don’t be afraid, these things must take place, “but the *end* is still to come.” So, yes, there will be various signs (again, every generation has them), but this is only “the beginning of the birth pangs.”

Winston Churchill, who was the Prime Minister of Great Britain during World War II, and is credited with keeping his nation’s spirits and hopes *alive* during the darkest days of that terrible war, was once quoted as saying (about halfway through the war), “Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it *is*, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

Well, Jesus is saying something very similar here, isn’t he? Yes, all these things will and must take place – war and violence, earthquakes and famines – but just remember this isn’t the end, merely the beginning of the birth pangs that *precede* the end.

And comparing it to the birth process is actually quite helpful here. Having been a father three times over, I have therefore seen and learned *firsthand* that that very first contraction, or birth pang, *is not* a sign that the birth is imminent. *No...* there will be many more where that one came from, many more contractions before that baby emerges; perhaps even hours and hours and *hours* of contractions even! (Now Jeanette's labors, fortunately, were not too long, but they *were* intense.) And so there will also be a lot of pain as well, and grimacing and grunting and perspiration. And a lot of cursing, too. Cursing directed primarily, as I recall, at the father-to-be who got the mother-to-be into this fine mess in the first place!

But this is not the end. As much as you may want it to be! Especially if your wife is holding onto your hand, and with her steel-like grip is crushing every bone and tendon *in* that hand!) Rather, this is only the beginning...

First, beware that no one leads you astray. Second, do not be alarmed by the things you see going on around you, for this is only the beginning and the end is still to come. And for our *third* point, we actually go back to our initial lesson this morning from the book of Daniel. Once again, we hear, "There will be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence." Not too comforting, is it? Yet notice what our reading from Daniel *also* says, "But at that time your people shall be delivered..." In fact, "Many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life..."

Now, there is clearly an element of judgment here as well since some of those who shall awaken will do so to "shame and everlasting contempt." But for *God's* people; for everyone who is found written in the book; for those who have been wise – *they* will shine like the brightness of the sky... like the stars forever and ever."

Daniel also seems to indicate that this great deliverer will be the archangel Michael. However, as Christians, we now see *Jesus* in that



role, of course. But, nevertheless, in 1 Thessalonians we read, “For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the *archangels* call (perhaps referring to Michael here), and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.”

So there is this sense, then, that the Second Coming will indeed be a big production, with much fanfare, and perhaps even with the archangel Michael still having an important role to play. But most of all, there is this comforting reminder that Christ *will* return, that God’s kingdom *will* be finally and fully established, and that we *will* be saved to dwell with the Lord forever...

First, beware that no one leads you astray. Second, do not be alarmed by anything that you see going on around you, for this is only the beginning and the end is yet to come. Third, while there will indeed be a time of anguish, it is precisely *at* that time that you will be delivered. And for our *fourth* piece of helpful, practical and hopeful advice, we finally turn to our second reading and the book of Hebrews.

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.” In other words, “keep the faith” because God can be trusted. He has already demonstrated that for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The God who did not spare his own Son, but who gave him up for us on the cross can therefore *also* be trusted to make good on all that he has promised us *through* Christ.

Someone once said, “Fear not tomorrow, for God is already there.” And Corrie Ten Boom added, “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a *known* God.”

And while we *are* holding fast to our hope in Jesus Christ, says Hebrews, “let us (also) consider how to provoke one another to love

and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” In other words, what should we be *doing* while we are waiting for the final fulfillment of God’s kingdom? This verse reminds us that we have plenty to do: loving each other; doing deeds to *act on* and to *express* that love, and then provoking others to do the same themselves; gathering regularly for worship and praise; and simply encouraging one another as we wait together for our Lord’s return...

When asked what he would do if he knew that the world would end tomorrow Martin Luther said that he would go out and plant a tree, because he wanted to be found by his creator continuing to live and work *fully* in the present.

Well, our lesson from Hebrews (indeed all three of our lessons really) asks *us* to consider that very same question for ourselves. If Jesus was coming tomorrow, what would you do today? Would you live only for the moment, or would you live with eternity in mind as well? And as Mary Anderson suggests, “Jesus calls us to do *both*; to live with the intensity of the last days while *still* living out our regular, everyday lives.”

...Every age and every generation has either wondered or feared if it might be living in the last days. And ours is no exception.

However, when thinking about the end of the world, I’ve always liked the story about the group of seminary students who were outside playing basketball during a class break, trying to work off the frustrations of studying their Greek and Hebrew. As they were going at it on the court, the old janitor at the school came out, sat on the back stoop, pulled out his Bible, and started reading.

The seminarians, all pumped up with pride about their theological knowledge and prowess, thought they would have a little sport with the old guy. So they asked him, “What are you reading?” Without looking

up, the janitor answered, “The Book of Revelation.” The one book, of course, that *focuses* on and deals with all of these notions about the end times.

“Whoa! You understand all that stuff?” they asked condescendingly. “Yup,” he said. “Well, what does it mean?” they challenged, eagerly waiting to pounce on any error or misunderstanding of one of the most difficult books to understand in all of scripture.

Well, the man drew a long breath, finally looked up at the young seminarians, and just smiled. With a twinkle in his eye, he said, “It’s real simple.”

“Well, what does it mean?” they asked impatiently.

“It means... God wins,” he said. And they just shook their heads and went back to their game of basketball. You see, the wisdom of the janitor’s answer was too profound to argue with.

God wins... In the end, when it *comes* to the end, that’s all we really need to know or to remember. *God wins!*

Amen.

**“Eve of Destruction”**  
**(written by PF Sloan; performed by Barry McGuire)**

The eastern world, it is explodin'  
Violence flarin', bullets loadin'  
Your old enough to kill, but not for votin'  
You don't believe in war, but what's that gun you're totin'  
And even the Jordan River has bodies floatin'

But you tell me  
Over and over and over again, my friend  
Ah, you don't believe  
We're on the eve of destruction

Don't you understand what I'm tryin' to say  
Can't you feel the fears I'm feelin' today?  
If the button is pushed, there's no runnin' away  
There'll be no one to save, with the world in a grave  
Take a look around ya boy, it's bound to scare ya boy!

And you tell me  
Over and over and over again my friend  
Ah, you don't believe  
We're on the eve of destruction

Yeah, my blood's so mad feels like coagulatin'  
I'm sittin' here just contemplatin'  
I can't twist the truth, it knows no regulation  
Handful of senators don't pass legislation  
And marches alone can't bring integration  
When human respect is disintegratin'  
This whole crazy world is just too frustratin'

And you tell me  
Over and over and over again, my friend  
Ah, you don't believe  
We're on the eve of destruction

Think of all the hate there is in Red China  
Then take a look around to Selma, Alabama  
You may leave here for 4 days in space  
But when you return, it's the same old place  
The poundin' of the drums, the pride and disgrace  
You can bury your dead, but don't leave a trace  
Hate your next-door neighbor, but don't forget to say grace

And...tell me over and over and over and over again, my friend  
You don't believe  
We're on the eve of destruction  
Mm, no, no, you don't believe  
We're on the eve of destruction

