

**Year C: Proper 28b Is 65:17-25; Cant 9; 2Thess 3:6-13; Lk 21:5-19  
St. Barnabas, Florissant – November 17, 2019**

**Focus Sentence:** God is creating a new kind of heaven and earth.

### **Sermon**

**I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit....**

This morning, our Scripture readings continue down the scary, apocalyptic (pre-Advent) path that we began last Sunday. *Apocalyptic*: you know, those writings are called “apocalyptic” that deal with the end of the world as we know it. If you recall, in last week’s Gospel passage, Jesus is closely questioned about life after death.

In today’s Gospel, we hear Jesus first speaking about the destruction of the Second Jerusalem Temple, finished by Herod the Great some 50 years previously. Jesus says that “not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” Indeed, this happened some 35 years later when Titus and the Tenth Roman Legion reduced that very Temple to a pile of smoldering ruins.

Jesus also foretells the persecution which would be the lot of his followers in the years to come, and Jesus knows that Christians will surely be hated by all, and that they will even be put to death because of Jesus’ name.

### **PAUSE**

Well, we could call these particular predictions of Jesus sort of a **prequel** to what we now know are actual historical events which took place during the first three centuries after Jesus’ own death. But what about those other remarks Jesus makes, remarks about what he calls “the end”?

Jesus speaks of wars and insurrections, of nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, of great earthquakes and famines and plagues, portents and great signs from heaven.

Jesus seems to be saying that these terrible things will all occur before “the end” comes to this world. And, like those questioning disciples of Jesus, we too want to know, “...when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” And so, we listen and take particular note of the wars and insurrections which are going on in various places throughout the world. We note the great earthquakes (and typhoons and hurricanes) occurring in recent times. We note the famines in Africa and other places, and even the media talk about our danger here on earth from asteroids and meteors --- certainly what we could call “great signs from heaven.” And so, we do wonder, “Are these the signs that the end **is** about to take place?”

I think that it's only natural to speculate about these things, and people have certainly been doing it for a long time. You might remember all the uproar in the media about the Mayan calendar, and the end of the world it supposedly predicted for December 21, 2012. Lots of people over the centuries have claimed to have the answer to the question about when the world will actually end as we know it, but remember what Jesus says in warning to his disciples (and us), “...many will come in my name and say, ...‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them.” It really isn't for us to know when this world will end. In fact, in another place in scripture, Jesus states that even he doesn't have the answer to this question; only the Father knows. (Mt. 34:26)

When you think about it, it really doesn't matter when the world will end. In the first place, we have almost no control over it, at least if it's caused by an asteroid or meteor. Of course, some might argue that we humans *are* causing a *gradual* end to this world through global warming, and we could actually do something about that. But some final, cataclysmic end; we've no control over that at all.

In the second place, we need to trust in our loving God, and live our lives in such a way that we're always ready to go and meet our God. Trust in God will give us a calm peace, no matter what is going on in this world. And that peace will result in a certain flexibility in our lives. As a friend of mine likes to say, "If this particular thing happens, or if it doesn't, either way, it's OK. I'll deal with things as they come along, with God's help." That's a wonderful attitude!

## **PAUSE**

But what about the aftermath of the world's end? What will that be like? Is it even appropriate to wonder about that?

Well, there are some wonderful words recorded in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, which we heard read this morning. Isaiah quotes God saying, "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind."

Two things strike me about those lines. First, the pains and tribulations we may experience in this earthly life won't be remembered in that heavenly life. Second, notice especially that God speaks of creating new heavens and a *new earth*. In other words, the life God promises to us after this world ends won't be like the cartoons of robed

figures sitting on clouds playing harps all day; how boring that would be --- at least to me! No, our existence then will be “new heavens and a new earth,” a much better version of what we know now. In fact, Isaiah goes on to describe that new existence this way:

“...no more shall the sound of weeping be heard..., or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; ....They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord --- and their descendants as well. ...” To me, that sounds an awfully lot like life today, only one with the bad stuff taken out. And especially for those of us who have seen children’s lives end all too prematurely, those words are much comfort which say that we will no longer “bear children for calamity.”

Isaiah’s words then close with the beautiful lines, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; ...They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.” In other words, the present relationships of predator and prey will be gone. No more killing; no more dog eat dog (or wolf eat lamb); no more of the strong oppressing the weak.

I like that picture of the world to come: familiar in all the good ways, but with all the suffering and pain and terror removed.

**PAUSE**

So, sisters and brothers, as we move toward the season of Advent, and as we continue to reflect in the coming weeks on the Judgment and on the end of the world, let's take yet more comfort in those other words of Isaiah that we recited today, what we call Cantic 9 in the Book of Common Prayer: "Surely it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid. For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Savior."

You know what? That's all that any of us **really** needs to know.

**AMEN.**