

**November 18, 2018 (Journey worship)****TEXT: Mark 13:1–8****TITLE: Stay Woke***By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy*

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

*When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?’ Then Jesus began to say to them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!”\* and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For 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.*

As they departed from the temple, the disciples remarked on the grandeur and magnificence of the temple. To which Jesus replied: “not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” Jesus’ statement to his disciples was almost unimaginable. Roman historian Tacitus described the “temple complex as a mountain of white marble adorned with gold...Its enormous stones mystified many, and the surrounding complex included sprawling courtyards, colonnaded courts, grand porches and balconies, covered walkways and monumental stairs. Herod built the temple to impress the wealthiest and most powerful rulers of the day.” No one could have ever imagined it possible to destroy the temple and yet the only part of it that stands today is the Western or Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

Grand and magnificent places of worship are not always places where everyone is welcome or respect is inherent, where the word is rightly divided, or where the people of God are empowered and uplifted. As grand and magnificent as the temple was it was merely a building, subject to fail and to fall. While the building not made by hand will last through all eternity. Disciples, stay woke, things aren’t always what they appear.

The slang term, “Stay Woke” has its origins in the events that took place in Ferguson Missouri after the murder of Michael Brown. Protestors suggested that everything was not as they seemed. Cameras focused on the looting of a McDonalds while dismissing or not showing the police who threw tear gas into the crowds and failing to mention or acknowledge that the milk looted from the McDonalds was being used to treat the effect of the tear gas. “Stay Woke” has been adopted into our vernacular denoting, “stay alert, be informed of everything that is going on around us.” Stay woke, or for those of you who prefer proper English, Stay Awake, or as Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise.” (Eph 5:15).

Jesus, Peter, James, John and Andrew climbed up and sat down on the Mount of Olives, directly across from the temple. One commentator stated: "This geographical detail bears theological significance...envision Jesus positioning himself in opposition to the structures of power he has come to transform." While seated there the disciples asked for clarification on "when the temple will be destroyed and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished." Mark 13 is known as Jesus' mini-apocalyptic discourse warning the disciples that in the end times, people will come in his name and lead God's people astray; there will be series of calamities: wars and rumors of wars, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines, and Jesus also cautions, do not be alarmed for these things must take place, but the end is still to come.

Several commentators indicated that once again Jesus was speaking language familiar to his audience. The Old Testament is replete with apocalyptic prophesy. Commentator William Placher states that "In difficult times...Jews turned increasingly to apocalyptic texts...secret texts revealed long ago to famous figures in Israel's history and predicting a series of catastrophes that would culminate in the end of the present age and the beginning of God's reign." (William C. Placher, *Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible Mark*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, 183).

How many times have prophesies and predictions been made that the end of time as we know it is upon us. As the conclusion of 1999 raced to a close, many feared that the year 2000 would usher in an apocalyptic end of the age. Some modern-day prophets take to the airwaves and stand in churches proclaiming that all the unnatural, natural disasters: catastrophic hurricanes, tsunamis, wildfires, floods, earthquakes; places of worship desecrated by wonton acts of murder; wars all across the world sometimes pitting siblings against sibling, nation against nation, culture against culture represent that the end is upon us. However, sadly none of these signs are unique, they have been occurring since the beginning of time. Cain killed his brother Able; nations have fought continually against another; the invasion of America by the Europeans resulted in the death of millions of Native and indigenous people and the enslavement of people of African descent; people hanged on trees or killed for the most innocuous reasons or for no reason at all; churches in the South bombed taking the lives of innocent children attending Sunday School; people gunned down in their places of worship as a result of irrational, unbridled hatred; wildfires that completely destroy towns resulting in the death of only God knows how many people; and the senseless loss of an average of 96 lives a day to gun violence. Are we living in the end times? Only God knows and if we are, God's grace and mercy about and God's love is everlasting.

Jesus said "all of these events are the beginnings of birth pangs." If you are a woman who has experienced child birth or are a spouse that has watched your partner's writhe in agony in the process of giving birth, you understand what Jesus was describing. These events and occurrences are gut wrenching, unimaginable pain that no human should ever have to endure—and yet at the end of the process, if there are no issues, a beautiful, anticipated, cherished and life-altering being is born. Everything calms down and we delight in the moment of that person's entry into the world.

Stay woke, for despite all the evil and hate and destruction in the world, God is still in control and will one day transform, and reconcile everything unto God's self. Listen to the words of Jesus, as he gives this assurance to his disciples on the Mount of Olive and to us today:

Mark 13: 'But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; \* for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

And I say: Stay woke people of God. Amen.