

November 25, 2018

“Big Questions: No More Questions”

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 and Mark 13:24-37

As we end our liturgical year together, celebrating Christ the King Sunday (and as we get ready to start Advent next week), we're done with all the Big Questions. Now **Jesus turns our focus toward the Big Ending, with a quick mention of a little ending too.** The little ending he addresses is the end of the Temple, and those who administrate it. The end of those who keep questioning God's ways and act like they know everything. The end of the smoke screen queries from religious leaders trying to discredit and trip Him up. The end of “What About?” or “How Come?” from the self-righteous who just want to hear their own voices. Jesus talks about the ending of the temple because His disciples ask one last question: “When will all this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” (Mark 13:4) Jesus answers their question about the ending of the Temple (which some of them will live to see with their own eyes in AD 70). But He also paints a picture of another END – the ultimate END; when all things will be made new, and the True King will rule forever.

At the end of this long discourse on the Mount of Olives – the location Zechariah prophesied Messiah would arrive (Zechariah 14:4) – Jesus spends less time answering His disciples' question and more energy declaring that the Big Ending will include this moment when “Everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26) to gather all His people together from every corner of the earth – which He alluded to needing to happen in Mark 13:10. Then Jesus leans on the cryptic prophecy from Daniel 7, identifying Himself as that ‘Son of Man,’ the One who will come to “the Ancient One . . . and [is] given glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and His kingship is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14) In other words, Christ the King Sunday should be every Sunday.

In the midst of the uncertainty and ambiguity, which we are always trying to erase with our questions, Jesus Himself will *become* the answer – which is actually better than having Jesus *give* us answers. One of C.S. Lewis' lesser known friends was a theologian named Austin Farrer. These words of his on my computer remind me I need to offer people Jesus more than give them answers to their curious questions; that **I** need Jesus more than answers to **MY** curious questions. Farrer once wrote, “We do not comprehend the world, and we are not going to. It is, and it remains for us, a confused mystery of bright and dark. God does not give us explanations: He gives up a Son . . . and a Son is better than an explanation. The explanation of our death leaves us no less dead than we were; but a Son gives us a life, in which we live.” And yet, we still want our questions answered, right up to the Big Ending of our own lives.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say, "I'll have a few questions for God when I get to heaven." Are you sure about that? Do you think it's possible that all the questions will disappear when we stand before the King of Kings as He arrives in all His glory? C.S. Lewis once wrote, "No answer. I know now, Lord, why You utter no answer. You are Yourself the answer. Before Your face questions die away." (*Till We Have Faces*)

But standing before the Son of Man when He comes in all His glory is down the road, isn't it? As I said last week, even Jesus doesn't pretend to know the specific timing of The Glorious Ending. He knows the Temple and its leadership will come to an end, "before this generation passes away." (Mark 13:30) But THE BIG END is His Father's business, not His. This, of course, means details of The End are none of our business either. And since we don't know when that END will be, Jesus reminds us to pay attention. "And since you don't know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert!" (Mark 13:33)

He is saying – among other things, '*Be on guard for distractions outside and inside the Church. Stay alert so that when the Master/King returns you aren't asleep at the wheel. Be careful not to let the culture squeeze you into its mold. Stay alert to the possibility that you will care more about things disappearing than My Words – the only thing that will last forever.*'

The leaders of the Temple had fallen asleep, been sucked into the power games of the Romans, and forgotten that walking according to God's covenant was a matter of faith, not force. They had fallen asleep while Herod rebuilt the temple for all the wrong reasons, attaching their own worth to the positions they held. They had stopped looking for and listening to the words of Messiah, because they thought that life with God began and ended with their words and wisdom. They were anything but "alert OR on guard." And that was a problem.

Jesus wants to make sure His disciples remain on guard and alert. Then He tells a story illustrating this and ends with, "I say to you what I say to everyone: **Watch** for [the Master of the household]!" (Mark 13:37)

Next Sunday, we will begin another church year with the season of Advent – a time of watching and waiting for Messiah's Arrival. That's what Advent means: the Arrival or Coming. For those of us who celebrate Christmas and the first arrival of Messiah, we also look forward to His Second Arrival – this scene depicted by Jesus in Mark 13, and connected to Daniel's vision.

To help us during Advent we'll be looking at the very first chapter of Luke's Gospel (for the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas). And we'll also invite you to consider using a devotional book called "Preparing for Jesus" by Walter Wangerin. Wangerin walks us through every verse in Luke (1 and 2) and Matthew's telling of the Christmas story. Every day there's a scripture, a reflection, and a prayer.

Christ is coming again – His second Advent – but it won't be in a manger this time. It will be “coming on the clouds with great power and glory.” (Mark 13:26) And He won't be coming to humbly inaugurate the Kingdom in a quiet little corner of Palestine. He will come to finally and fully and globally usher in His Everlasting Kingdom – when everything will be made right again in the new heavens and the new earth.

Can you imagine how beautiful it will be for everything to be put back together, and made right again? Can you picture a Kingdom that is full of unconditional love, justice for all, perfect peace, and utter joy? Are you anticipating a time when broken relationships – including the ones you and I have caused or find ourselves in – experience reconciliation. When King Jesus arrives, it will be **for good and forever** – as Daniel prophesied.

The Son of Man WILL arrive again someday. The King has come once . . . and will come again. And then . . . these imperfect bodies and lives will be replaced by glorious ones – reflecting His glory perfectly. And all of our questions about the brokenness of life will fade away because He'll replace the brokenness with wholeness.

I mentioned a few weeks back that Eugene Peterson – a pastor for 29 years, a professor, and the author of *The Message* and numerous books – had passed away during the week leading up to Reformation Sunday. His funeral was the first Saturday of November, live-streamed around the world. In typical Eugene Peterson fashion, it was in a small Presbyterian church in Kalispell, Montana, with no well-known pastors of large churches or famous authors and celebrities in attendance.

His son, Eric, who is also a pastor, helped lead the service – along with others. During his reflection on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (chapter 4) – and the Gospel we carry around with us in cracked vessels and “jars of clay” – Eric reminded us that his dad wasn't only a master “word-worker” but master “wood-worker.” When Eric's first child was born – the first grandchild for Eugene and Jan – his father came up from Maryland to Princeton Seminary with a special gift he had made. It was a cradle – now in the front of the church holding a baptismal font at the head of Eugene's casket.

When he first brought the cradle, Eric's dad confessed it had some flaws in it and that he had to use a few shims. Eric had learned from his dad over the years that everyone carpenter who works with wood needs to use shims – to make that which is crooked and imperfect straight again. For the life of him – over some thirty years of passing the cradle on to various grandkids and nieces and nephews – Eric could never find a single flaw in the cradle.

And then he told us that over the last couple weeks, while he was making his dad's simple casket, he ran into a few problems with the miter joints. The boards weren't coming together just right. He confessed that, he too, had to use shims.

Every vessel that carries the Good News of Jesus – that's you and me – is flawed in some way. We are crooked in some way. We need to be shimmed. But when Christ the King comes again . . . when He makes all things new . . . there will be no more need for shims. "Come, Lord Jesus."