

It is Well With My Soul

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September 22, 2024. Today we focus on those moments when the world as we know it seems to change, as it did for Jesus' disciples when he told them that he was going to have to suffer and die.

Reading: [Mark 9:30-37](#)

*** Transcript ***

I remember exactly where I was, and what I was doing, when the world as I knew it ended for the first time. Twenty-three years, eleven days, and somewhere around two hours ago, I was at my desk in Eden Prairie, MN, when my co-worker Jody called to tell me. Two planes had crashed into the tallest buildings in New York City, and over the course of that morning and well into the afternoon, we watched in disbelief as those buildings collapsed, and I willed the phone to ring again with news that my cousins, who lived and worked in New York City, were safe.

The days that followed were full of horrific images of destruction. Many of us remember this. We remember stories of death and very near misses, and the strange silence in the absence of airplanes that we were used to hearing overhead. I found myself feeling lost. I had no idea what to do next, or even how to survive in a world that suddenly seemed so uncertain and so foreign to me. I shared with my dad what I was feeling, and he told me about the day his world seemed to end: November 22, 1963, when President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated.

The world as I know it has ended since then, sometimes in very global ways, like what we all experienced living through the pandemic. And so much that is happening in our world today — the violent destruction, oppression, and death, in Gaza and in Jerusalem and Ukraine and so many other parts of the world, the gun violence and political upheaval and opportunistic hatred toward anyone different — can almost feel apocalyptic, leave us feeling powerless, and hopeless.

And sometimes, our world ends in deeply personal ways, like the March day last year when my mom's serious dementia erupted shockingly into full view. We've all had those moments: the phone call, or the letter, or the personal event, that shakes the very foundation of everything we know, rendering our world unrecognizable to us.

This morning, just nine chapters into the Gospel of Mark, the disciples have one of those moments, one that is both global and deeply personal. The disciples thought Jesus was going to save them, expected the miracles Jesus had been performing to continue, but as we saw last week, we have a sudden shift in this narrative. And today, Jesus lays down the earth-shattering truth: he, their Messiah as Peter proclaimed, will be taken. He will suffer and he will die. And there's nothing they can do to stop it.

The disciples, if you notice, respond in one of the ways that we humans often respond to such news. It's important to know, first, that although our translation makes it sound like this is going to happen sometime in the future, the Greek actually says this betrayal is happening. Now. Right in front of them.

And the disciples have no idea what to do with this, and they don't get the urgency of the situation. They're so afraid of what Jesus is saying that they can't even ask him what he means, or how they can help. Maybe they feel shamed at not knowing. Perhaps, they don't want to understand. And who can blame them? Jesus is heading to death, and the disciples have, and take, the option to step away, out of

their fear. It's risky to stay connected, and how human it is, and how easy for us too, when the world out there falls apart, to separate ourselves from it, to be more concerned about ourselves and our own comfort and safety, than we are about those whose well-being and lives are in jeopardy.

So, the disciples, as we sometimes do, find something completely different to talk about, something to distract themselves from the reality that is presenting itself to them. I recall trying to convince myself that my mom's confusion and paranoia was a blip, a short and temporary aberration that would quickly resolve. In the case of the disciples, they delve into speculating about who is going to be first in the military kingdom they believe Jesus is going to establish. But the reality doesn't go away. The world as they know it is ending in front of them.

And in the middle of that reality, hope appears, like a tiny flicker of flame so small we might miss it. The disciples certainly did. Jesus will be betrayed and killed. And three days later he will rise. Out of death itself, life will come. If you notice our flowers today, the dark flowers on the bottom that Sarah put together with the light flowers coming out. Out of death, life will come. Death is never the final word. Three days after death, Jesus will rise again. And in fact, in Christ, death leads directly to new life. It is no accident. Always, and forever. And that, beloveds, is one of the most important messages of our faith.

In 1873, Horatio Spoffard and his family were booked on the French liner Ville du Havre to travel from the United States to Europe, when his world came to an end. Spoffard was delayed, and he sent his wife and his daughters ahead of him. The ship went down, and only his wife survived. He immediately set out to join his wife in Wales, and as his ship passed the spot where his daughters were lost, he wrote a poem, and Philip Bliss set it to music. "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, though hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well, with my soul!"

We know what God does with times like these. The pain, despair, and death are real. And so too, is God's presence in the midst of our pain, and the life God brings out of death. So what are we to do, family of faith, when the world falls apart? Jesus tells us this, too: be servants of all, and embrace the children, embrace those who are most vulnerable when the world falls apart. Because always, and especially when the world falls apart, God calls us to come together. To allow our hearts to break, and embody love in the world as Christ did. To live, as James wrote, with the gentleness and wisdom that can only come from God. To face the brokenness with courage, speaking truth, speaking love, speaking healing, knowing that, as we heard last week, Jesus went first. Out of death and brokenness, Jesus always and everywhere brings life, and it will be well with our soul.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

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