

**FLIPPED: The Script**  
**The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC**  
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*Mark 13:1-8*

When we woke up this morning, we woke to a world of expectations.

Not on purpose; it's just where we live, in a land where life is usually pretty good. If the weather turned cold overnight, the heat probably came on so that we woke up to a comfortable room temperature. If it was dark, we reached for a light switch so that we could see the path to the coffeepot. When we were ready, we walked into a room with running water and prepared ourselves for the day.

These are the kind of things we expect to work on an average morning. Most of us will take them for granted until they don't work. The alarm doesn't go off. Our hot water heater doesn't do its job. The light switch is non-responsive. Can't turn the coffeepot on. Even the internet is down.

Maybe we realize that all these mysterious things have happened because the power to our house has gone out. We panic for a minute, or get frustrated. And we think, *"This is not how my morning is supposed to be."*

And yet, a simple power outage in most of the world can be the start of a good day. The things that annoy me are no big deal in those places where a very different script is being played out. There are people dealing every day with problems I can't even begin to imagine: political and religious oppression, malnutrition, limited access to water, civil unrest, overt exploitation and environmental abuse.

Whether we live with stability or instability, there are always people who interpret the events around them as a *"sign of the times."* The next opportunity you have to go grocery shopping, check out the tabloids and see how many of them offer some insight or information about our last and evil days.

Many of us remember Y2K – for younger folks; Y2K was the nickname we gave to that moment we transitioned from the year 1999 to the year 2000.

It was predicted that when the new century began, every computer on earth would stop working properly because they were not programmed to account for the date change. Kids, ask your parents, it totally freaked us out!

Throughout human history humans have been trying to predict the date of our future destruction. As these predicted apocalypses approached they followed a predictable pattern: tension would build, people would pray, some of them might even be a little nicer to each other. But once doomsday passed, and nothing happened, everything would go back to normal. Until another was predicted, and the cycle would begin all over again.

Our text for today, situated toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, finds him in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the home of the political, religious and social elite. It was also the place that pilgrims visited in order to fulfill their religious obligations. Right before the tragic scene of his capture, trial, and execution, we read what scholars call "Mark's Little Apocalypse".

It begins as Jesus and his followers leave the Temple. One of the disciples looks up and expresses his sense of awe at the magnificence of the building. Perhaps he was captivated by the masonry available to those with wealth. Certainly no one built that kind of structure in little old Galilee.

In response, Jesus tells him these stones won't be in place for too much longer. Of course, the disciples wanted to know when and how and why such a thing would happen. For them, the destruction of the Temple was the worst crisis they could imagine. Of course they want the details!

We all know people like that... the ones who want to know everything in advance. Knowledge is power and it is human nature to seek it. We crave the inside scoop, especially during times of upheaval, change and anxiety.

Even now, we can be seduced into believing that someone has all the answers. That is why advertising works so well - someone else knows what will satisfy us. So we go broke trying to find success or depressed because we don't have the means to get it. We're focused on the ornate masonry of the temple, cookie cutter forms of beauty and worth.

Check out the characters who seem to know and speak the story line of end times. It seems like it is always the "haves," not the "have nots" who know the most about those details and what is coming next. People already on the margins of society, those that the spiritual, political, and social elite have

ignored, they are not looking for it. They don't have time, and they have nothing to lose. They're just seeking equality, justice, and peace.

The subversive Gospel of Compassion that Jesus shared intimidated those who wanted to gather and maintain power (it still does!). The elite are always outnumbered by the multitudes. For them, things like liberation and equality are quite threatening. And Jesus often experienced opposition to the liberation and equality that he preached.

You know how they say "the enemy of my enemy is my friend?" Opposing groups can become allies when it serves their best interest. The ones with power cannot fathom the liberation of those accustomed to living in the margins.

So what happened behind the scenes in Jerusalem in the days before Holy week was the gathering of a coalition. Members of three distinct groups - the Pharisees (the political elite), the Saducees (the social elite) and the Priests (the spiritual elite) found they could work together to stop the movement that began around this dynamic preacher and teacher. They didn't want to risk sharing their privilege for fear of diluting their status.

We live in a divided nation and factional times. Partisan politics are keeping countries across the world from being united and strong. Warring nations and unabated violence still exist. Religious schisms and fervent fanatics are ruining our confidence in God. Society is disintegrating through personal attacks, constant crossfire, and philosophical arguments. Atrophy and despair seem to be growing all around us, instead of a brave new world of a golden new age.

And it feels to me lately like we are at a crossroads – politically, religiously, and socially. Unless we start working together, we're going to end up destroying ourselves and the universe won't even know we ever existed.

Dwelling on the topic of the end times isolates us; because it stresses individual survival and maintenance of the status quo. Rather than hearing this future talk as a call towards radical change and action, it becomes further evidence of why we need to protect ourselves. It gives us permission to ignore destruction, violence, abuse, and pain. We feel compelled to retreat to a safe place, close the door and work out our own survival.

So when we hear about a rise in homelessness, or children being abused, or the plight of the poor, we ignore it. We dwell in fear so that we may relieve ourselves of the responsibility of transformation.

Jesus told the disciples, *"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, don't be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is still to come."* And then a few verses down he says, *"This is but the beginning of the birth pangs."*

A long time ago I joined the church because I thought it was the best way to change things in my family, my neighborhood and across the globe. As a religious professional, I still believe that is true, especially when I see the work our faith community undertakes together to make lives better and alleviate suffering. Strong local congregations like MCC are the key to healthy, compassionate communities. You are an inspiration.

But I also wonder if perhaps we Christians have struggled for so long against one another that we've missed precious moments to spread Christ's love. We've argued over theology and doctrine, and excluded those who make us feel threatened. We've looked inward deeper and longer than we've looked outward. And isn't that a shame?

Jesus' prediction about the destruction of the temple was symbolic of the systems and institutions of his day which oppressed and excluded some of God's children. Perhaps in the tumbling of the stones he was pointing to an end of a status quo and the birth of justice and freedom for all the people.

Our job as modern day disciples is to remain committed to the radical good news that love is still in control, and a new way of life, justice, and peace will be revealed. That's what we who live in hope do... we dare to proclaim that the old script of violence, destruction and war has run its last performance and the time of cowering in fear is done.

Our responsibility is to raise our voices, our mission, and our welcome so that good news will be known. The realm of God, which carries a new vision of justice, freedom and love, is coming to the stage. May it be so, and may it be soon. Amen.