

**Apocalypse Now?**  
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**Mark 13:1-8, 24-37**

I wonder if you remember this scene about a half an hour into the first Matrix movie...the hero of the story is Neo, played by Keanu Reeves. In the movie, his quiet, ordinary life is interrupted when he's kidnapped by secret agents who work for the Matrix, which is a computer programming system that basically controls the world - keeps it in line. A character known as Trinity saves Neo, and brings him to Morpheus, the leader of the resistance movement played by Laurence Fishburne.

Morpheus, you see, believes that Neo is the one who can save them all from the oppression of the established system, known as the Matrix. He meets him and offers him a choice of two pills, a blue one or a red one.

If Neo takes the blue pill, then the story ends there. Neo will wake up in his bed with no memory of the kidnapping, rescue, or what he's learned about the Matrix. He can return to his ordinary, predictable life. If Neo chooses the red pill, then he will, like Alice, continue to tumble down the rabbit hole towards this strange, new world. He'll have a chance to understand and see the Matrix for himself. Morpheus seals the deal by telling him "All that I'm offering you is the truth, nothing more."

Of course, our hero Neo takes the red pill.

Reading this Markan apocalypse this week, for some of us, feels a little bit like swallowing the red pill.

The term "apocalypse" comes from the Greek apokalyptein, which means to uncover or reveal something that's normally hidden. It's like pulling back the veil or a curtain so that we might see the world as it really is.

So, I wonder, what have YOU seen this week?

I hope that what has been uncovered for your eyes has been kindness, integrity, grace, selflessness. Maybe that hasn't been the case for you, and you have a few other choice words you'd like to describe... I won't judge.

You know, when you think about it, we're not the first human beings to live through challenging times. Whether it is those early disciples, worried about Rome destroying their society like in today's scripture reading, or my great grandparents who lived through the Depression in the earlier part of the last

circumcision or owning a copy of the Torah, they would be tried and put to death.

As a result, Jerusalem – for a moment, anyway - lost its very identity. Torah was no longer the law of the land. The entire cultural and political and religious system of the temple and the holy city had been displaced. For the faithful, everything in their world was upended.

But the people found a way to come together under the leadership of the Maccabees and make things right again. This historical era came to be known as the “abomination of desolation.” The Jewish people remember it today as the miracle of light, Hanukkah.

Fast forward to Jesus’ lifetime, and his people are no longer under Syrian occupation, but Roman. History, as we know, has a way of repeating itself – maybe because we haven’t learned the lessons yet. Again, the political and religious elite are in cahoots with their overlords. Again, for Jesus and his followers, the temple leadership has been corrupted.

So, what will happen? How will they sustain their religious identity in the face of this new, yet all too familiar threat? And how will those who feel threatened respond to Jesus’ active and public resistance?

They already know the answer.

Jesus isn’t trying to scare the disciples and his other followers for the sake of scaring them. He isn’t using threats of destruction to coerce the people into following him. Jesus is just reminding them of what they already know about what happens when we face destruction and loss.

Their role, he tells them, is to act with integrity, even in the face of great fear and suffering. But he also offers them some hope. He promises that their long walk in the wilderness will soon be over. Even the fig tree’s tiny, tender sprouts are breaking out in the middle of chaos. New life is being born, what will that look like?

In some ways, this text is about us. It is our new reality. But in other ways, it was never about us. We remember that challenge, upheaval, and disruption are not new to human experience.

We all know people who have gone through trials, difficult and hard things... people who have become bitter and angry. We know of others, who, looking back, were able to see grace and have used their trials to become even more generous and kind.