



“This is But the Beginning”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Mark 13:1-8

13 As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” ² Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵ Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’^[a] and they will lead many astray. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸ 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.

Sermon:

This is a scary text.

Wars, and rumors of wars. Nation against nation. Earthquakes and famines. Not a stone left together on the walls of even the most sacred of places.

Well, no. not one, Jesus says.

Because the sacred precincts of the temple were filled with corruption more than prayer.

And the sacred precincts of many of our religious spaces are equally filled with corruption.
And we see the wars. And we hear the rumors of more wars.
And we have the earthquakes and the famines that drive millions to be refugees.
Heck, we have one better...
We have catastrophic wildfires.
Droughts and torrential hurricanes...both! Rising seas, melting ice caps!

But we know this already. It is all around us, already.

Jesus, what next?

Well, that this is the beginning...of a new life.

This is but birth pangs...labor.

If you have been in labor, you may recall...excitement and nervousness...the new baby is finally on its way! After months and months and months of wondering and waiting...
You may recall anxiety...am I strong enough to go through labor? How long, how difficult, how painful, will it be?

In the words of my midwife attending the birth of my daughter, my first child...you can do this because you know it will end, and then, you will have your baby!

Jesus, what is it that you are saying?

When we come to church, and we just want a break from all the heartbreak. When we come here into this space just wanting some gentle smiling souls beside us, some music to uplift us, some word of hope to encourage us...

You warn us of chaos!

And then you make a promise: the baby is coming. Hang on, breathe through that next contraction, walk through the pain and the exhaustion of those birth pangs, that long labor...

The sweat, and the pain, and the exhaustion are all worth it, because...this is the beginning of life!

So, it's not about the wars and the rumor of wars? It's not all about the earthquakes, or the nations rising up against each other???

Not if you are a mom, or a dad who has helped a mom, through the work of birth pangs, through the hours of labor!

No, it's all about the baby, the life about to be born!

The baby is on its way! The new life is coming and it requires that you walk the halls between contractions, and that you suck on ice chips.

The new life is coming and it will come...it will take time and sweat, and some anxiety.

Sometimes the laboring woman will swear at her helpers. And yell. Nonetheless...

You will have helpers.

You will have assistance.

You will have to have determination.

You will have anticipation and worry and hope, all mixed together.

And love, already, pouring out of you...

That's what it takes for a baby to be born. Whether through c-section, or a long, slow labor...babies need all of this from us, the ones who so eagerly await them.

And Jesus declares: the Reign of God is coming, like a baby comes. (How did we miss this?!)

Look around you, here are the helpers; midwives and doula's, and doctors, too.

Look around you, here are the determined ones, ready to assist that birth, the coming of that new life.

Here are the ones full of joyful anticipation.

Here are the people full of love, awaiting the new world of God with love and hope pouring out of them.

Did you come here today sad?

Did you come here today preoccupied and worried?

The world is such a seeming mess.

Politics, factionalism, anger and alienations between us. (And we are still going to have to sit down for Thanksgiving with difficult family in a few days, too!)

Yes, that is all there. The words of Jesus are words of fear...for some. But they are words of hope for others...

Jesus calls it "labor pains".

He says it will not last...these are just the signs at the beginning of the new life.

Hah! Enough then!

No despair here! No despair now!

Rather, amazing hope! Look past the blur of sweat and pain, and see, the baby is coming!

The reign of God, Jesus promises, it is coming.

Hold out your hands and catch it!