

One of the ways I have come to learn what people believe is through the discussion of what will happen in the end time. Frequently is the time in some social gathering, that I will be asked “Do you believe we are living in the last days?”

People will point out examples of wars, the decline of morals in particularly American society, as well as global phenomenon and make the connection to the Bible to justify their belief that we are in the last days. Others will equate such things as the “Left Behind” series or the Mayan calendar that ends in the year 2012 as predictions of the end of the world.

What is seldom remembered is that in the history of the Christian Church, segments of every generation have viewed themselves as living in the last days. As a third grader I remember people believing that the world was going to end because of Nuclear power coupled with then President Reagan’s foreign policies and the cold war. I remember people saying the world would come to an end with the first gulf war in 1991. Y2K was to bring the world crashing down around us. People who tried to

read into Revelation a time frame for the end of the world were convinced the rapture was only days away.

Every generation in the Christian community has faced trials of various kinds and in various places throughout the world. In America, we don't have the fear of physical persecution for our faith that others do in parts of world. But we do have our trials.

Our trials express themselves in value clashes. Society has one set of values. The Gospel frequently lifts up values that go counter to what our culture deems successful.

So, what are we to make of Scripture passages such as the 13th chapter of Mark? How might we respond when someone approaches us and says, do you believe we are living in the last days? Are you ready for the rapture? The rapture is an event by the way that has no scriptural support and is not part of our Lutheran theology.

Take heed to what our Lord says. "Do not be alarmed." What Jesus does is to make the coming of a new day akin to birth. There is pain. There is anguish. Jesus says these things are necessary to ushering in the Kingdom of God. That is what he was speaking to then with his

disciples, and that is what Jesus is speaking to us now. God's reign will come and in the Lord's prayer we ask that we might be a part of that coming.

When we hear the phrase, "do not be alarmed" there is more to be said. What more there is to say is that we are not alone in these days. Jesus is with us, even in the face of troubling events, be it on a personal or communal level.

Jesus endured emotional and physical pains. He succumbed to death, and a humiliating death at that. Yet death could not contain Jesus. Death not only failed to keep him, but God raised Jesus to his very right hand, a position of authority, a position of divine love. For through him we have forgiveness of sins. Through him we are united together in one family. The resurrection of our Lord gives us hope for every day, even as we approach the last days whenever that might come.

That is how those in the early church coped with their belief that they were living in the last days. It also offers wisdom for how we might live today.

Since we have a great High Priest in Jesus our Lord, Let us approach all things in full assurance of faith. Continuing

in the language of the book of Hebrews, “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering (especially in the struggles that come our way) for he who has promised is faithful.”

God is faithful. So, taking the worry of end times off our plate, let’s let go of some of our other worries as well. When we let go of our worries we can do something really interesting and life giving. We will have all this time to consider how we might “provoke one another to love and good deeds.”

What a vivid picture. See a picture of the church meeting together as we do Sunday after Sunday, for this is a place where we can encourage one another. This is the place where our hope is restored.

This is the place where we rejoice in the baptism of infants and adults. This is where we uplift one another in our struggles. In doing ministry through our daily lives, as generous givers, teachers of faith, musicians, as care givers, and in all of our vocations, we are a reflection of God’s love for the world.

For in doing these things we discover that God has given us a great joy. That joy is to be among those for whom

God delivers the fullness of his life. It is the joy of bringing a taste of the heavenly life into this world.

The last days will come. And when they do, God will be with us. So as a congregation and as families or individuals, consider how we might not only encourage, but provoke one another to love and good deeds. Amen.