

'2012' and Signs of the End
Trinity Episcopal Church, Aurora, IL
November 15, 2009 – 9:00 a.m.
Hebrews 10:11-25, Mark 13:1-8
The Rev. Charles A. de Kay

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated.

Good morning!

I'd like to begin this morning with an informal survey. Please raise your hand if you have seen the movie, *Independence Day*. Will Smith and Jeff Goldblum go whoop the aliens after they destroy half of the cities of the world. Well, film director Roland Emmerich is up to it again. The filmmaker who gave us the newest *Godzilla*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, and perhaps until now is best known for the mega-hit *Independence Day* has done it again. He's back with another world-stomping disaster movie: *2012*. According to film critic Roger Ebert, *2012* is "about as good as a movie in this genre can be." In fact, Ebert calls it "the mother of all disaster movies (and the father, and the extended family)." "It's not so much that the earth is destroyed, but that it's done so thoroughly. . . . You think you've seen end-of-the world movies?" Ebert asks. "This one ends the world, stomps on it, grinds it up, and spits it out."¹

The end of the world has, of course, long been a staple for storytellers, but in recent years this theme has been especially popular. It seems to hold a particular fascination in our post-global warfare age, in our post-nuclear era. From the *Mad Max* movies that made Mel Gibson a star to the recent re-boot of *Battlestar Gallactica* on television, we seem to be transfixed by visions of the End.

The roots of our imagination about Armageddon live deep and wide in our collective psyche. The Bible, when taken as a narrative from Genesis to Revelation, tells a story of the lifecycle of our species (and the world as we know it) that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The end, of course, is just a new beginning, but it is the end of everything as we know it.

The Day of the Lord – Judgement Day – is a favorite topic of the prophets in the Old Testament. Jesus speaks of it, too. In our Gospel reading, as he warns his followers – us – to beware of those who will lead many astray. As our belief that the End times are upon us grows, we've seen all sorts of self-proclaimed Messianic figures and their disciples (just in our own lifetimes) – from the followers of Jim Jones, who died drinking poisoned Kool-Aid in a colony in Guyana; to the followers of David Koresh, who perished at his Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas; to the bizarre story of the members of Heaven's Gate, who chose to place their trust in a mix of religion and science fiction, looking to Hailey's Comet for salvation.

In today's text from Mark, Jesus identifies a series of Signs of the End, which we sing about with holy expectation in a number of our hymns. This is the moment we pray for when we begin the Lord's Prayer, praying that "Thy Kingdom come." And yet, it is a dark and fearsome time. From the prophet Amos to Jesus of Nazareth, the End is described as a time of sorrow and "tribulation as has not been from the beginning of creation."

¹ *The Beacon News*, Movies Section, pages 1, '2012' by Roger Ebert, Friday, November 13, 2009.

Above all, perhaps, it is explicitly **not** ours to say **when** the moment will come. A few verses down from where we ended our Gospel lesson, Jesus says, “But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” It’s a mystery that awaits us.

The author of Hebrews speaks of it, too. In this book, the notion of the End is given a very different spin. Summing up our lesson from Hebrews this morning, the author points out that in Jesus, we no longer need intermediaries to connect us to God – in Baptism we have all been commissioned for ministry and are priests, who can appeal to God directly, and then the author says “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and **let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works**, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**”

In other words, how might we live our faith if we were faced with Armageddon? How might we live today, if we knew today would be our last day on earth? Might we let go of the fears and the inhibitions that keep us from loving one another with holy abandon? It’s a cliché that when characters in stories are faced with imminent death they apologize for old hurts and/or they finally tell someone that they love the other.

If the End was in sight, how might our worship change? Would our love for God take on a new fervor? At our Baptism, we promise to turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as our savior. We say we place our whole trust in his grace and love. Faced with our own End, might we be more diligent in living into the promise to persevere in resisting evil and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Would we do things differently if we knew today was our last chance? Might we be more loving to our neighbors? Might we worship as if it was our last chance to get it right?

What would you do, if you knew the End was imminent?

Of Roland Emmerich’s end-of-the-world movie *2012*, Roger Ebert calls it “one of the most satisfactory films of the year” and says that it “gives you your money’s worth.”² It clearly strikes a nerve in our collective imaginations and I have no doubt that it will be a massive hit. Within a couple of years, many of us will have seen it. Curiously, for those of us who do end up seeing the movie, we are likely to do so trying to “escape reality” for a few hours. I wonder what would happen if, instead, the movie reminded us to grab today by the horns, to live more fully into the only reality we ever have: the present, re-kindling the spark inside each of us, to live with passion and a sense of urgency about the fundamentals – being true to ourselves. Might this empower us to live more courageously, more generously, more faithfully, more freely?

What of all of the other end-of-the-world dramas out there? Could they wake us up, rather than lull us to sleep?

To quote a favorite poem of our family by Mary Oliver:

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do

With your one wild and precious life?”

Gracious God, give us the grace of a holy sense of urgency about our lives, that we might have life and live it more abundantly. In your holy name. Amen.

² Ibid, page 2.