

Unveiling
Mark 13:1-8

There was a detective in England famous for always getting to the bottom of every mystery.

With a keen eye and a demand for facts, not wonder, for evidence, not imagination, he always presented to his client a solution to the mystery: neatly described, all questions answered, each mystery solved and neatly wrapped in a box of rational and sensible explanation.

We like guys like that detective because we like to know the reasons for so much in life that seems to have no explanation.

Not only in our private lives, but the big cosmic questions too, most folks want to know the why and when and wherefore to the big questions in life.

Why are we here?

Why did she die so young?

How can people be so cruel to one another?

The list of course is endless.

It's why books like the Left Behind series are so popular, those graphic and gory novels about Jesus coming back as a kind of heavenly Terminator, and why crazy people have no trouble rounding up followers to drink poison or join a cult awaiting the last days.

The need to know that there is structure and form and answers can sometimes be overwhelming.

The disciples are no different.

They are living under the thumb of Rome.

At the time Mark's gospel is written, the war with Rome is in full swing, and the Temple, if it isn't destroyed by the time Mark finishes her gospel, well, it will be soon.

Then, as now, there are wars and rumors of wars, danger, famine and calamity.

Then, as now, people want to know why, and when it will end, and how.

So today, they put the big question to Jesus: "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"

And Jesus, as Jesus often does, answers an entirely different question — or better — he answers what they ask by pointing them in an entirely new direction.

Allow me to explain.

We often think of God as a giant engineer who has a very specific blueprint, a very precise design, for all of creation, where everything is mapped out and planned for some grand finale, with the good getting their just desserts, the bad their punishment, and we are all given the long hoped for explanation of the whys and wherefores of life's tragedies that have befallen us.

God becomes for us a larger version of the famous detective, who will one day wrap it all up and hand us the answers to all of life's mysteries: rational, sensible and clear cut.

Perhaps we think like that because if we were God, and we had a universe to run, why, that's what we'd do!

But Jesus seems to be saying that God is actually not like that at all....

Whether he is eating with untouchables or healing the unworthy or confronting the religious fat cats in their Cadillacs, over and over Jesus seems to be saying that God is less like the Chief Engineer at General Electric and more like Picasso, more like Monet.

That God is less like a stiff and predictable manager and more like an eccentric, wild, even crazy, artist, who, rather than ensuring that reality is fitting in with his plans — comes and dances within this reality of ours, and in the dancing, helps us to see that there is no predetermined end, no set conclusion, no neat box of explanation — but rather all that is unfolds in mystery and joy and pain and sorrow and laughter and peace and wonder as we all together move ever so slowly into the as yet undiscovered country.

"Don't waste your time trying to figure out when or if there is a final wrap up," Jesus tells them, tells us, "but **live** this new life where mustard seeds take over gardens, where invisible yeast creates scads of bread, where the dead in spirit are raised to new life, where enemies become fast friends!"

"Don't look up for your answers," he says, "but look around, look inside....."

There's an old cartoon showing a man staring into the sky.

Another fellow wanders by and asks "What are you doing?"

"I'm waiting for Jesus to come back."

"But that's silly; you don't need to stare into space to find him," replies the other man.

"You can find him in ordinary life, in loving your neighbor, doing good to those who hate you, in suffering for the truth."

The man replies: "Did you say suffering for the truth?"

The man goes back to gazing into the sky.....

"This..... is much more comfortable," he says. Garland, *The New Application Commentary*, 310, citing J. Feiffer.

I think what Jesus might be saying today is that when we look into space for Jesus to return, we are relying on the detective's solution to the mystery of life, and when we do, we miss the very thing we seek.

The purpose of our life is not to muddle through in the hope of someday having all of the muddle explained and rationalized and justified.

The muddle is **our life, and it is God's life too.**

It's in the muddle where we are invited to live with compassion and kindness and gentleness in coming slowly to see that **the muddle IS the miracle of creation**, in which it is not only God who is the artist, but you and me, and every other human being too.

Our purpose, as creatures made in the image of the Creator, is to join with the Creator in a creation that is not yet complete, not yet defined, not yet determined.

Which is why the word apocalypse doesn't really mean "endings," ... it means "unveiling."

Which is why the calamities of our lives are not, in the end, disasters; they are, in the end, the pains that always come with new birth, new life, new beginnings.

The old detective eventually came to see that his worship of fact and evidence, of every mystery wrapped up neatly, was a miserable failure, because it only waded into the shallows of what it is to be human.

What that old detective came to see at the end of a long life is that fact and evidence are indeed poor step-sisters compared to the depths offered by wonder and imagination, because wonder and imagination, that is, our hopes, our longings, our compassion, our ability to see beyond the way things merely appear to be; these are the ties that bind us, yes, to one another, and even more so, to God.

+amen.

