

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
November 18, 2018  
Matt Phillips  
Director of Campus and Youth Ministry  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI

*For you will not abandon me to the grave,  
nor let your holy one see the Pit.  
You will show me the path of life.*

This may come as no surprise given our scripture readings for today, but I found preparing for this morning's sermon quite difficult. After all, when it comes to the "End of All Things," if I'm being honest, there are really only two things I can stand here and tell you about it: a sort of good news, bad news deal. Naturally, I'll begin with the Bad News, but to build up to all that, though it might seem strange considering the inherent destruction that comes to mind when considering the End of All Things, I'll begin by telling you a story about building.

When I was younger, I was a fairly creative child and particularly fond of making things: whether that meant playing with Legos, drawing pictures, or even sawing and hammering away at spare scraps of wood around my family's garage. My favorite past-time was to create things: anything. And so, my favorite thing to do whenever my family would go to the beach was to build sand castles.

I remember one family trip to a beach in northern Indiana where I had decided I would build the tallest sand castle I possibly could. I had grand plans; I think I ended up building the thing up to a good two to three feet before a stranger pointed out the forces of nature that threatened my castle's structural integrity.

As they tend to do, the waves started to creep higher and higher up the beach. It was only a matter of time before they would eventually reach my castle and destroy it completely. Then the stranger gave me a suggestion to try and save my creation: if I built a moat around my sand castle, perhaps that would provide some protection. So I dug and dug and dug the moat, but soon learned I was only prolonging the inevitable. The moat I dug just couldn't keep the water at bay and my sand castle was swept away into the depths of Lake Michigan along with all my hard day's work.

Feeling pretty deflated, I asked the stranger if he knew any ways to keep sand castles from being washed away. "No," he said, "all things come to an end. That's just the way things are."

All things come to an end. At first glance, this may seem to be the central message of today's gospel passage. Not only do we learn that all things have endings, but we learn about what the literal End of All Things will be like. We read about destructive natural disasters, dishonest leaders, and a world at war: supposed peaceful order devolving into violent chaos. Of course, all of this can be summarized in Christ's prediction of the destruction of the Temple. You see, the Temple was the cornerstone of society in ancient Jerusalem, representing not only the supreme

sovereignty of God but also the entire system upon which their society was based. The destruction of the Temple would mark an end to that system. For the disciples hearing Jesus' prediction of its destruction, they would understand this to mean that neither the structures nor systems we create will go on infinitely. All things come to an end.

And this is true: at one point or another, all things do come to an end. As we near the end of Autumn and the beginning of Winter, I am mindful not only of seasonal endings but how each year ends as well. School years end; stewardship drives end; holidays end; moments of happiness, phases of our lives, even our very lives themselves all end. It is the nature of things. The Second Law of Thermodynamics (laws that describe the basic foundations of our universe's behavior) tells us that all matter will eventually degrade or break apart. All things will end. Because of this, it may seem that the narrative told by history and the laws of the natural world is that the powers of disorder, destruction, and death are the penultimate sum of existence. The Gospel tells us otherwise.

It is true that all things in this world will one day come to an end. Scripture admits this, as we can clearly see from today's reading from Mark. However, this "End" is a bit of a misnomer because it doesn't mark the completion of the story, but simply the beginning of another. Just as each night is followed by a new day, just as the story of Christ's passion was not defined by and did not end in a tomb but in His glorious Resurrection, our story is not defined by and will not end in disorder, destruction, or death, but by the eternal life promised to us by the Christ who has no end.

When I began, I told you there are two things I can tell you about the End of All Things: Good News and Bad News. The first thing I can tell you (the Bad News) is that it's going to happen. I don't know exactly when it will happen, nobody does and I'm usually pretty skeptical of anyone who says they do, but at some point or another it is going to happen. But don't worry, because the second thing I can tell you (the Good News) is that the "End" won't really be the end; simply a new story's beginning. So, if you're ever afraid that tomorrow won't come, if you meet the end of one moment of happiness and despair that you'll never find another, or if you find yourself starting to believe that death really is what defines *this* story, I pray that you might find comfort in the knowledge that our God is not a god of death but the God of life and will raise you to a new without end, and until then, may God help you to live *your* life, here and now, abundantly. Amen.