

Signs of the End

The gospel for this coming Sunday (The Last Sunday of the Church Year) is Mark 13:24-27. In this text there are very many sign posts about the end as well as the warning that the end date is only known to God. BUT, sandwiched in all this is the comforting promise that God's word well not pass away.

"But" of verse 24, dissociates the destruction of Jerusalem from the end of the world. The disciples and the original readers of Mark could not have identified the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world because of what is said in verse 10 and verses 32-37. The destruction of Jerusalem, of course, was a reminder of the end of the world. "Day" in verse 19 is contrasted to this verse where "day" must have a much wider meaning because we are here dealing with the very end of the world.

The description in vv. 24-25 does not necessarily refer to a complete breakup of the universe. It was language commonly used to describe God's awful judgment on a fallen world.

"Coming in clouds." "He makes the clouds his chariot" (Ps 104:3 ESV) because he is Yahweh, coming to deliver his people. But he is also Yahweh the Son of Man, for here is a plain allusion to Daniel's night vision. It is an allusion and not a quotation because Daniel sees Christ's ascension, not his second coming; the direction is exactly reversed. At his ascension, Christ goes trailing clouds, as it were, from creation to heaven; at his return he comes from heaven, likewise trailing clouds into creation. The clouds that seem to roof this world simply mark the border crossing. Thus, the world is not roofed over at all, but wide open to (defenseless against?) the divine: To see the clouds is to see his ready chariot.

Jesus will return on the Last Day to judge all humanity, fulfilling OT prophecy and His own predictions. No one will enter the kingdom of God by works, nor will any mere religion save anyone. Because Jesus died and rose for us and because the Holy Spirit created and sustained saving faith in His people, we can be sure of our salvation no matter how fearsome the Last Day may be.

Prayer: Set my heart, O Savior, on the life and hope above, so that shadows of this world may not darken my sight. Amen. (TLSB)