

“It’s the end of the world as we know it. It’s the end of the world as we know it. It’s the end of the world as we know it. And I feel fine.” (Lyrics, Great Big Sea, ,End of the World, 1997).

Thanks to Great Big Sea for that happy song.

Well, I don’t know how many of you have experienced an actual earthquake. We have. A few actually. Mostly aftershocks, minor vibrations. But there was one several years ago when we lived in Grande Prairie, that was something more than that. We were up late playing cards with friends. And before anything else, you feel it in your gut. In the pit of your stomach. An uneasy, unsettling feeling. Then a bit light-headed. Dizzy. The wind begins to howl, and then suddenly, a sound unlike any I have heard—first whistling, then a deep, eerie rumbling in the air, the light fixtures beginning to sway, the windows rattling; the house shaking, feeling like the ground was giving way beneath my feet. My eyes growing big, the colour instantly draining from my face, fear gripping my heart; beating wildly out of control. While my hands are white knuckling the table top, as if that would really help. But that’s what we do. Cling to anything that promises a foothold when everything around you seems to be falling. But Darcy? Seems he was enjoying it. He was grinning from ear to ear, running from window to window, filled with a giddy excitement—a joy, really—all he could say was, “This is really cool! This is really cool!” And I’m sure somewhere in the background Great Big Sea was playing, “It’s the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine!”

Well, that was one earthquake. A very small one as far as earthquakes go, the epicentre hundreds of miles away, and doesn’t even begin to scratch the surface of the

devastation of the 7.2 magnitude earthquake that rocked Haiti in August of this year, that remains the deadliest disaster of 2021, followed up by a tsunami and mudslides, and a total collapse not only of structures and buildings, but of cities and societies, leaving hundreds and thousands dead; and a country that will take years, perhaps decades to rebuild. So no wonder the apocalyptic end-of-the-world readings that often accompany the close of the church year are ones that people would much rather not hear; and frankly, that pastors would much rather not have to preach.

And it is a message the disciples do not want to hear either. Do they have direct experience with earthquakes? We can't say for sure. The witness of both the Old and New Testament and how many times the word earthquake appears, suggests that earthquakes were not uncommon. And the witness of Google and online "scripture" suggests the same. That the world is on shaky ground seems fairly certain; no matter if the streets are paved in cobblestone or asphalt; no matter what century we walk in. And while physical devastation and destruction in itself is frightening enough; and definitely not something Jesus makes light of; we also know that Jesus talks both about physical brick and mortar; but more about the systems and structures behind the buildings and what they represent. Today, as the disciples marvel at the beauty and construction of the Jerusalem temple, Jesus delivers a shock-wave, some very earth-shattering news that rattles their foundation. "Not a stone will be left on stone." Well, people. This is not a Great Big Sea concert. The disciples are not clapping and stomping their feet and singing at the top of their lungs, "It's the end of the world as we know it; and I feel fine." Let us pray.

The disciples had just been in the temple with Jesus. We had been there too. James and John, those twin brothers whispering about places of power as they pointed to the religious leaders in their long robes expounding their long, eloquent prayers. Matthew, the tax collector, taking notice of the rich lining up to put their exorbitant offerings into the treasury. And all those who were honored for how they spoke, what they wore, the gifts they gave. It was a who's who of the rich and powerful. But Jesus warned us not to get caught up in it all. That the temple and those who served it had been built off the sweat and exploitation of widows and the poor—"Point in fact," he said, "Look! Look at the widow over there as she puts in her two small coins. She is one of the many devoured by the very ones you give honour to here."

It was something to think about; or maybe no one got it, really. Because then we went outside to the courtyard. And it was easier said than done not to get caught up in all anyway. The music, the sacrifice, the food booths. The smell of smoke and burnt flesh rising in the air. The bright blue skies and the evening sun, just beginning to set, the golden rays catching the brilliance and beauty of each stone of the temple walls. For small town fishermen, it was a sight to behold. "Jesus! Look!" One of the disciples exclaimed, echoing the words of Jesus only moments ago inside the temple. Did he see the widow? Was she in the courtyard too? But no, the disciple is pointing to the temple, "Look, Jesus! Look, what large and beautiful stones!"

Was it sour grapes; that the disciples hadn't gotten the message; that the stones laid here were stones of oppression, borne and raised on the backs of the poor? Had

they not been listening? Well, we were there with them—had we heard what Jesus was saying? Without thought for letting him down gently, Jesus looks this disciple, (I won't say which one...), looks him square in the eye, "I've already said there's no glory in this building, or these stones. As for this temple—mark my words—not a stone will be left on stone." And there it is. That uneasy, unsettling feeling in the pit of my stomach. Like the ground giving way beneath my feet. I saw Peter's eyes growing big, the others; their faces instantly draining lifeless; fear gripping hearts now beating wildly out of control. It was a shocking picture of a not-so-distant future we knew we were already in. Not the mere harmless shaking of window panes or even a fierce howling wind. But a rumbling emanating from the very foundation of the earth's core; stone by stone by stone, the entire world shaking, tumbling, crumbling; in complete, utter destruction and desolation; an out and out end of the world as we know it. And Jesus this was really not cool; and I know I was not; that no one was feeling fine.

Jesus was warning of times to come, a time when the world and our realities would constantly be changing, a time of big questions when it would be hard to know what to do; how to respond; and what and if this world can be saved. Honestly; I think they were already in the middle of it—maybe we are too—the increasing gap between rich and poor. A time of hunger and disease and uncertainty. A time when long standing faith systems are torn down just like the temple of Jerusalem. A time when the boots of war trample and rumble and shake the foundations of the whole of the world. A time when even the earth and all creation can no longer bear the pain of

melting polar ice caps and disappearing rain forests. A time of flood and tsunami and earthquake and storm as the ground crumbles crumbling beneath our feet.

The challenge, the hardest thing, has always been to find a foothold; what to grab onto; in whom or what will you believe. Because what you believe; who you believe in shapes not only how you are in the world and what happens next. Faith shapes who you are—your hope, your being, your very life. So don't just grab onto the next rising power; the next crumbling, tumbling stone, Jesus says. Because not any stone of oppression, not any system built upon the exploitation of the poor; no trampling boots of power or greed that continue to feed the wealthy and rich while the hungry go away empty—no stone will be left on stone. No rising constructions of hatred and exclusion that welcome conformity but continue to push aside those who do not comply to expectations of gender or race or class—no stone will be left on stone.

We want to know when. To be able to prepare. Find other footholds. Because we know that our feet too, have been and are yet firmly planted in this crumbling ground. That as the stones fall, truly it is the end of the world as we have lived it. Truly it is the end of the world as we know it. But then again, maybe the end of the world as we know it is exactly what we need. And maybe it is what we have hoped and longed for all along. That with the coming of God into our world that certain things would finally come to an end. I mean, don't we? Long for an end to hunger and poverty, and child trafficking, and slavery, and the life-crushing pain all around? We know the struggle that even while we yet cling and grasp and often even honour the oppressive

stones and structures of our world; while one foot is planted the temple courtyard; the other is already walking the dusty road of discipleship where the deepest longing, the dream and call of God is for a kingdom and world of change. The hope we cling is that Jesus calls us disciples, calls us deeper into the unfolding of God's kingdom of life in Christ, that in the midst of the pain, God is already birthing something brand new.

“Do not be afraid.” Jesus says. Jesus is not trying to scare us. But to assure us. That something larger is a foot. The bold promise, the assurance, and comfort in these uncertain times is that God is at work in our world in Jesus and by God's Spirit of Life; and with God that will always mean creation. That something is about to happen. That with God there is and will always be something brand new. And the end of life as we know it, does not mean the end of life, but the beginning of something even more beautiful. New life, new hope, new birth. It is the message and work of the cross. That God is fulfilling, perfecting, shaping the future toward God's end—God's end of justice and peace; the hungry filled with good things; the poor raised up, welcome to the outcast; healing for the sick and for all nations; God's end of fullness of life and love for all people and for all creation. That life with, in, and through Christ, is God's construction, God's priority and precedent firmly planted in the sure foundation of God's love. That God is busy setting us free, setting our world free, God is busy raising us to life! Nation will rise against nation. There will be famines and earthquakes and war. And not a stone will be left on stone. But do not be afraid. For *it is* the end of the world as you know it. But I am about to birth something brand new.” And giddy with excitement, all God's people said, “Thanks be to God! This is really cool!” Amen.