

**Reading:** *Your last 15 minutes before the end of the world, ranked from worst to best.* Essay by: Jonny Sun

The first time Kristin sent this to all of us we all ended up in tears, because it hit so viscerally, and because we realized how intensely true it was. But as I thought about it again, when it came pinging back into my brain as I was contemplating what to say this morning, one thing kept cycling through my head, at the heart of all of this, this essay, our lessons this morning, is community, is the commitment, the promise of being together, being with one another, even when the world feels like it's ending.

Every generation has gone through those moments when they're certain the world is coming to an end. For the disciples who were about to witness Jesus' crucifixion, right there on Calvary hill, the world was ending. For the people Mark was writing his gospel for, they had experienced Rome's merciless sack of Jerusalem, witnessed their Temple, God's home amongst them, get destroyed. The world for them was certainly near to ending. For Luther, for people living during medieval times, the very real presence of plagues that were literally unstoppable, that made the very air you breathed or the water you drank a life-threatening thing, the world had to have been ending. The moments are too innumerable to name. World War II. Pearl Harbor. The Holocaust. The Cuban Missile Crisis.

September 11<sup>th</sup>. Covid. Sometimes the moments are even global, but much more intimately personal. The death of a loved one. The ending of something you have cherished. We all are far too well-acquainted with the feel that the world just might be ending. That this may be it, and we have to figure out how we have to deal with these final moments, be they fifteen minutes or fifteen years.

How would you deal with the end of the world? It's a question I would imagine we all have contemplated, and it's a question that clearly is plaguing the brains of James, John, Peter, and Andrew as they take it what Jesus has told them this morning about the Temple and stones being throw down and life seeming like it would be on the brink of destruction. They want to know how to prepare, what to look for, how they can know when they need to shift into end of the world mentality, when they need to start their countdown. But...Jesus doesn't really give them an answer. He says that honestly, things are always going to feel like that. There are going to be wars and famines and earthquakes and charlatans declaring that this is the end, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's happening right now, this very minute, or sometime in the next fifteen minutes. At the heart of Jesus' answer to them is this: don't be afraid of what you cannot control, of what

you cannot stop, of what you cannot predict. Do not let the fear of what may or may not be coming dictate how you live.

Underlying that is this message: let the gospel dictate how you live. Whether the world is ending in the next sixty seconds or in the next sixty thousand years, let love be your guiding force, let seeking to make the kingdom of heaven on earth your main goal and action, let ministry, mission, hope be your North Star, because even if there are sixty seconds left, shouldn't those sixty seconds be filled with love? If you spend all this time living in fear and questioning, the world isn't going to be any better, your heart is going to do nothing but fret and fear, and life is hard enough without contemplating how it might be ending any moment. *Live* that is Jesus' message. Live in love, live in hope, live in ministry, live in the gospel, and if the world ends tomorrow, then at least you know you lived every second of your life committed to bringing the kingdom to your neighbors .

The author of Hebrews takes Jesus' message and ups the ante a smidge. They too are living in a time when people all around are fearing that *the Day* is approaching. It is coming and coming soon, and they're responding in one simple way: hunkering down into isolation. They're sinking into themselves and saying, if the world is ending well then I'm going to gather my own people and ignore everything else. The writer says

no no no, that's not the answer, but in fact do the opposite!! Get together!  
Be a community! Encourage one another in love. Promote good deeds  
amongst each other! Even if the world is ending, love one another, be  
together, be a community, because that's what we're all about.

It is far, far too easy in our world to find reasons to not be together, to  
find reasons why community isn't worth it or why it's ticked us off or why  
it's pointless. There are plenty of reasons we give ourselves for going it  
alone and not worrying about others. There are plenty of reasons why we  
say we'd rather just worry about ourselves and if the gospel happens to play  
out in our lives on a regular basis well then that's gravy, we're just trying  
our best to survive until the next world comes crashing in moment arrives.  
But the reality is...that's no way to live. Life in fear, life on the edge, life  
lived in second to second worry is nothing but exhausting.

Life together though, life in community, life in love, life living out the  
gospel? That's worth it. It gives us hope, it's gives us a reason to keep  
pushing forward, it helps us bear the world-ending moments easier because  
we aren't bearing them alone, and it helps remind us that God's world is  
bigger than us, and it takes all of us to make heaven on earth. Would you  
rather live in fear or love? Would you rather live in isolation or in beloved  
community? Would you rather ignore the gospel or *be* the gospel? The

world could end in the next five minutes, it could go on for another five millennia, no one has any idea. So wouldn't it be better to spend however long we have committed to love and to one another? Whether it's fifteen seconds, fifteen minutes, or fifteen thousand years, wouldn't they be better spent in love? Wouldn't you rather say no matter if the world ends tomorrow, I am dedicated to loving God, loving my neighbor, loving all of God's children, today? Isn't one second of love better than one second of fear? Isn't one second of community better than being alone? Ignore the timer, ignore the clock, live. Love. Let us be together, for however long we've got. **AMEN!!!**