

Sermon Note: Do Not Be Alarmed

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

As we continue our Truth-Telling series, we're invited this week to examine a moment when Jesus spoke to his disciples about unsettling times ahead. In what is known as Mark's "little apocalypse" (Mark 13), Jesus describes events that sound chaotic and fearful—wars, natural disasters, and upheaval—but he also offers a calm reminder: "Do not be alarmed." This teaching challenges us to look beyond our immediate fears and recognize that God's presence remains constant, even in difficult times. Jesus encourages us to have a deep and resilient hope, a hope that grounds us in the knowledge that whatever we face, we are not alone. As we anticipate gathering for Worship, let us consider what it means to hold onto faith in an unpredictable world and to find assurance in the love and presence of God.

Illustration Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rq_GCeIJ60I

In *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2013), President Snow warns Katniss Everdeen that uprisings and rebellion are stirring across the districts. Although his message is one of intimidation, Katniss remains calm, holding onto her courage and purpose despite the fear around her.

Why This Video?

This clip shows a moment when Katniss chooses not to be shaken by fear and intimidation, embodying a steadfastness in the face of looming threats. Like Jesus's advice to "not be alarmed," Katniss's response serves as a reminder that even when we face daunting circumstances, we can choose to remain grounded in our values and purpose. For us, this strength comes from the assurance of God's constant presence, allowing us to live with hope and courage instead of fear.

Video Discussion Questions

1. How does Katniss react to President Snow's warning? What does her reaction tell us about her inner strength?
2. Think about a time when you felt intimidated or overwhelmed by a difficult situation. What helped you stay calm, or what might have helped?
3. What do you think motivates Katniss to stay focused on her purpose rather than letting fear dictate her actions?
4. Katniss represents a hope for change to those around her. How can our faith help us become symbols of hope for others in times of trouble?
5. What does it mean to you to "not be alarmed" in the face of challenges or stressful news?

Mark 13:1-8 (NRSVue)

¹As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” ²Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. The temple was an impressive structure in Jesus’ day, both beautiful and central to religious life. Why do you think the disciples were so impressed by the temple (v1)?
2. When Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, he reminds the disciples that even this seemingly permanent structure isn’t immune to change. What does Jesus predict will happen to the temple buildings (v2)?
3. What warning does Jesus give about future deceivers?
4. Jesus offers his teaching not to scare us, but to assure us that God’s presence endures, even through times of turmoil. He reminds us that we are not alone in difficult circumstances. Reflecting on your life, how do you typically respond to stressful or alarming news? How might you shift your response to align more closely with Jesus’ teaching in this passage?
5. How might Jesus’ instruction to “not be alarmed” guide us in dealing with the uncertainties or challenges we face daily?
6. Jesus calls us to a profound and untamed hope—a hope that weathers hardship and expects that something significant can emerge from life’s struggles. Can you think of a specific situation or action this week where you can apply Jesus’ teaching about a resilient hope, one that remains steady even in the face of struggle or uncertainty?

Additional (Optional) Questions

1. The Temple was the center of life in Jesus’ time, but Jesus had to remind his disciples that even that cornerstone wasn’t permanent. What changes have you seen to important structures in your lifetime? These could be physical structures, such as buildings, or systems and laws that provide structure to our lives.
2. What do you think future historians will write about wars in Ukraine, the Gaza Strip, and other places?
3. Does your list of personal worries focus more on family matters, school and friend issues, or national and international concerns?
4. Where do you turn when you feel troubled by what’s going on in the world or alarmed by things that affect the circle of people closest to you?

5. How can your church community and your worship/prayer life provide hope and assurance of God's presence when times are tough?

Weekly Action

This week, practice shifting your focus from worry to trust. Whenever you feel anxiety rising, take a deep breath and remind yourself of Jesus' words: "Do not be alarmed." Consider writing this verse down on a sticky note and placing it somewhere you'll see often, or try using a dry-erase marker to write it on a mirror you frequently see in your home. Let this verse be a reminder to bring your concerns to God and trust that you are not alone. If you feel comfortable, share this practice with a spiritual partner or friend, reflecting together on how this shift in perspective impacts your outlook and peace.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for your words of truth that guide us in times of uncertainty. Help us to hold fast to your teachings and find peace in your promises. As we go into this week, may we be bearers of truth and calm, trusting in your everlasting love. Amen.