**Bad News and Good News (**[**Mark 13:1-8**](https://bible.oremus.org/?version=NRSV&passage=Mark%2013:1-8&vnum=yes&fnote=no&show_ref=yes&headings=no&semico=yes)**,** [**Daniel 12:1-3**](https://bible.oremus.org/?version=NRSV&passage=Daniel%2012:1-3&vnum=yes&fnote=no&show_ref=yes&headings=no&semico=yes)**,** [**Hebrews 10:11-25**](https://bible.oremus.org/?version=NRSV&passage=Hebrews%2010:11-14%20%5b15-18%5d%2019-25&vnum=yes&fnote=no&show_ref=yes&headings=no&semico=yes)**)**

*By Cate Florenz*

I’ve got bad news and I’ve got good news. If I were a prophet, that’s how I’d begin. Because that’s always how it is, isn’t it? I’ve got bad news, and I’ve got good news.

Today’s readings are about the “end” which sounds a lot like bad news. Daniel is an apocalyptic book in our Bible that deals in end-times imagery, and this section of the thirteenth chapter of Mark is often called the “Little Apocalypse” because of its similar focus. Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple, earthquakes, famine. Bad news. In the book of Hebrews, our author, who either is or more likely isn’t Paul, is encouraging early Jesus-followers to remain faithful as the Day-with-a-capital-D is approaching. Of course in the Greek there’s no capital D, but you know what I mean. The Day. The End. The Judgement. The time at which we will find out whose name is “in the book” as Daniel puts it. That sounds terrifying. It sounds, dare I say, like bad news.

I find the whole idea of the Day-with-a-capital-D kind of horrifying, honestly. However, what is fascinating about this type of literature is that to its original audience, it isn’t bad news. It’s good news. The book of Daniel provides hope and assurance of God’s justice and devotion to God’s people, even though they were experiencing oppression and injustice. The book of Daniel is the first place in our scriptures in which individual resurrection is predicted. And that is good news. That is a message of hope to a people whose life is one of ongoing struggle. The book seems to say, everything seems wrong, but God is going to make it right. *There is more than just this*. Similarly, the author of Hebrews insists that God, through Jesus, has *already* made things right, so to speak. That Jesus’ resurrection assures us that in time God’s kingdom will be revealed.

God will institute a reign of love and justice. Or, somehow, Jesus has already instituted a reign of love and justice. While the disciples – especially in Mark – often ask off-topic and self-centered questions, in this case I’m with them. My question is the same as theirs. *Jesus, teacher, can you tell us, when? When does the love start? When will we live in peace and justice? When does what feels like pain, what feels like bad news, transform us? When do we get to start over and live again? When?*

But yet again, Jesus does not answer this question, and he goes so far as to say, later in this chapter, that not even the angels in heaven nor even he, the Son, knows, but only the Father knows when. Still, the question of when lingers in the very front of my mind. *When*? Jesus doesn’t say. What Jesus does say is telling; he makes three points:

Instead of telling us when these things will happen, Jesus says first, “keep your eyes on me; do not be fooled by imposters. Second, “do not be afraid,” and third, and I think this is so important, “this is but the beginning.” It is the birth pangs – the labor – through which something new is being brought to life.

What if instead of talking about “end times” we talked about “beginning times”? Can you imagine a man standing on a corner with a sign that said not “The end is near” but “The beginning is near”? How would it change the fear we feel about the state of this world and the suffering we experience if we were truly confident that this is the beginning, and all things are being made new. And what if the answer to “when” was *now*.

While the readings from Daniel and Mark point forward to an apocalyptic moment, the author of Hebrews points backward, to what has *already been accomplished* in Christ. The author tells us that Christ has *already* offered the perfect sacrifice and *already* opened a way through the curtain. The bad news of suffering in this life intersects with the good news of God’s kingdom already come. It is already here, and also not yet. And we are living both in and outside of it, in what you might call the “meantime.”

In the meantime is an odd place to live sometimes it’s hard to wrap our heads around the idea that God’s kingdom is already and also not yet. Luther describes this reality in his Two Kingdoms doctrine, in which he says we are living both in this world and in God’s kingdom at the same time. Just as we are simultaneously saints and sinners, God’s kingdom is simultaneously here and not yet. We are living in the overlapping space between the two. We are living in the meantime, but it’s an odd place to be, because we have to contend with the mundanities of this world even as we insist they don’t really apply to us.

The author of Hebrews helps us by giving us guidance on living in the meantime. The author writes: Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together. That’s three pieces of very good advice: first, hold fast to our hope second, provoke one another to good deeds; and third, meet together. Be together.

And that is, in a sense, what it means to be a Christian living in the meantime. It doesn’t mean that there won’t be suffering – that there won’t be bad news – but it means that the story always ends with good news. It means that we are in the process of being remade. Our lives exist simultaneous in this world and the next, and our instructions are clear: hold fast to hope; provoke one another to good deeds; and be together in community. When we do that we not only *see*, but we *are* the good news. God’s kingdom is in us. And that’s good news.