

SERMON: "LIVING ON THE EDGE"

SCRIPTURE: MARK 13:1-8

DATE: AUGUST 23, 2015

Mark 13:1-8 (NIV)

As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

<sup>2</sup> "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

<sup>3</sup> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup> "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

<sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. <sup>7</sup> When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains."

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I'm not sure if it was original to the Toronto Rock Lacrosse team but I really liked one of their advertizing slogans from several years ago.

They said that they would sell you the whole seat for the game but you'd only need the edge.

Doesn't that conjure up excitement, enthusiasm and expectation?

That's what we think of when we think of sitting on the edge of our seat. The adrenaline rushes. The heart pumps stronger and the pulse races.

The term "living on the edge" has that same sense of excitement about it. The edginess keeps one alert---sharp---ready.

Most of us don't live on the edge. We only occasionally sit on the edge.

As time goes by we inevitably grow comfortable and secure in our lives. Indeed, if we don't have that sense of comfort and security, we do what we can to get it.

In truth, we can't live with constant adrenaline rushes and heightened heart rates. We'd wear out. The body and mind couldn't take it.

Living on the edge can be dangerous and perhaps that's one reason we seek it in small doses, if at all.

Our Scripture lesson from Mark 13 is guaranteed to raise the pulse a bit. In it Jesus begins to tell the disciples of signs of the end of the age.

The entire chapter has been called Mark's mini-apocalypse. It's reminiscent of the style and theme of the Book of Revelation which is the classic Christian example of apocalyptic writing.

Apocalyptic literature was a special kind of writing that was very popular at the time of Jesus. It dealt with looking at the end of the

world using very clever and meaningful symbols. Imagery---often powerful and wild imagery, was used to paint word pictures.

In our lesson, Jesus responded to a comment on how magnificent the Temple was. He looked past the building to a time when it would be destroyed. Indeed the Temple was to be destroyed within a generation of Jesus speaking these words.

Jesus then took the disciples on a verbal journey to the end times.

All of the chapter focuses on symbols and events that will show that the end time is about to happen.

But the reason Jesus told the disciples these things wasn't so they could pinpoint a date.

It wasn't to give them a head start so they could get their affairs in order.

It wasn't to let them gloat when things happened and they could say "I told you so."

Actually, with the exception of the destruction of the Temple, none of the disciples saw the things Jesus said would usher in the end of the world.

We haven't seen them yet, 2000 years later.

The point Jesus was making was to watch out---be prepared---persevere in the midst of the struggles to come.

Soon, there were going to be times when Christians truly believed that the end was near.

Within a decade or two, nearly all the 12 disciples would be dead--mostly as martyrs.

Within a generation, persecution would seek to destroy the Church, even as the Temple was destroyed.

The end of the world didn't come but threats to bring about the end of faith and the end of the Church were certainly on the horizon.

The key was to be alert---be prepared and persevere. Believers would have to dig deep to continue to be enthusiastic and energetic about a faith that could cost them their lives.

Things wouldn't be easy for anyone who followed Jesus. Their own end could come at any time.

In effect Jesus was telling the disciples that they would have to live on the edge.

Danger would lend an edginess to their lives. Their faith would have to persevere in the times when it would be a lot easier to give up and give in to the pressures that opposed God.

After the resurrection and after the Church was up and running, many in the first generation Church did actually believe that Christ would return before they died. They lived in expectation. They lived

with energy and enthusiasm because they fully anticipated they would live to see the Second Coming.

I doubt that their adrenaline and heart rate stayed locked in a high-octane mode. But they lived on the edge. They lived with an edge. They lived with an attitude that remained focused on the Lord, day in and day out.

Remember, late in 1999, when some people thought that the New Year would bring about the end of the world? The year 2000 was anticipated with a curious mix of excitement and foreboding.

Of course, as our calendars flipped over from 1999 to 2000, nothing special happened. Even the computers seemed to take it all in stride.

I remember reading, though, that Church attendance spiked in the last few months of 1999. People wanted to make sure their connections were in place, just in case. There certainly was an energy--an edge to living in the last few days of 1999.

But nothing happened.

Things quickly returned to normal.

I bet it's been about 15 years since you've given any real thought to the end of the world.

But I wonder if living on the edge might not be an important lesson for us, as Christians?

I'm not talking about panicked living as we try to categorize how world affairs are pointing to the end of the world.

I'm not talking about the edginess of stress and busyness in life that takes up so much energy.

A group of Americans made a trip with Brazilian natives down the Amazon River.

The first day they rushed. The second day they rushed. The next day they rushed.

One day, anxious to continue the trek, they were surprised to find the natives seated together in a circle.

When asked the reason for the delay, a guide answered: "They are waiting. They cannot move further until their souls have caught up with their bodies."

Living on that edge isn't helpful to anyone at all, even if it seems to be the expected way of life nowadays!

The edge I'm talking about is what the first generation Christians had. The edge that came from listening to Jesus' words to watch out---be alert---be sure to persevere in faith.

We seek comfort and security but such things can be very hard on faith. We can actually find our faith and our lives too comfortable--  
-too secure.

Faith needs to have an element of edginess to it.

It has to be energized.

It has to express itself with some enthusiasm.

A comfortable faith in a comfortable Church leading to a comfortable life trying to make sure that our part of the world remains comfortable isn't what Jesus had in mind for 1st century Christians or 21st century Christians.

I suspect that the world will not end for a long time---probably many, many generations from now. But no one can say, as an individual, that tomorrow is promised to them. The end of our world might be just around the corner.

Without being maudlin about that truth can we not use it to do some stock taking about our lives and our faith?

Can we not seek to look at our priorities and our attitudes to life in such a way that might begin to change the way we live?

Can we not accept the challenge that Jesus offered to live our faith out with alertness, perseverance and enthusiasm?

If we knew that our lives were coming to an end soon, there would certainly be an edginess to living. As sad as it would be, we would have the gift of setting our priorities correctly.

Our priorities with God.

Our priorities with others.

Why do we have to be under such threat to set priorities correctly? If priorities are correct under threatening circumstances, surely they must be correct when all is well.

Living out our faith on the edge can make an incredible difference to the way we serve God.

It can make an incredible difference to the way we see others.  
It can make an incredible difference in the way we live our lives.

An anonymous poet put it this way:

"When the last hungry person is fed  
And the last homeless one put to bed;  
When the crying of the children is stilled  
And the cupboards of poor homes are filled;  
When the Gospel of Christ has been preached  
To the last, the lost and the least;  
When sad, broken hearts have been mended  
And sin and crime are all ended;  
When Christ rules the hearts of all men  
And this earth is a little like Heaven;  
Then---why, then we can sit idly by,  
Wait in peace for our Home in the sky.  
But while sin, death and want are around us,  
And evil forces surround us,  
God give us the grace to attack it  
And keep "everlastingly at it."

Lots left to do!

Living on the edge reminds us how to do it!

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