

Last Pentecost  
November 22, 2009  
the Rev. Ken Kroohs  
[\(Daniel 7:9-10 & 13-14, Ps. 93, Rev. 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37\)](#)  
[End Times](#)

St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, High Point, NC

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH ... AND THE MEDITATIONS OF ALL OUR HEARTS  
... BE ALWAYS ACCEPTABLE TO YOU \_\_\_\_ OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER  
AMEN

Today is Christ the King Sunday ..... Another and more relevant title is the  
Last Sunday after Pentecost.

The reason I say that is more relevant is that indicates we are at the end of  
the church year .... church year 2008! If anyone ever tries to tell you the  
Episcopal Church is liberal just tell them the Episcopal Church is so conservative it  
takes us 11 months simply to change the calendar!

The reason we start church year 2009 next week is that we start with the  
time before Jesus' birth ... known as Advent, and cycle through His birth =  
Christmas, finding out He is the Son of God - Epiphany, the time leading up to his  
crucifixion - Lent, His resurrection on Easter, then what some call the birthday of  
the church - Pentecost. Others call it the beginning of Christianity – the moment  
when we are told it is our work now. The last season is the long season of  
Pentecost when we try to understand what it means to be a Christian.

The intention of all this structure is to help us focus on different aspects of  
our spiritual lives at different times.

Part of understanding what it means to be a Christian is struggling with how it will all end ... what scholars call “eschatology” – those of us who can not spell that simply call it “end times”. Those brief and scattered passages in scripture which SEEM to talk about the world ending ... the world ending either with or without Jesus’ return – depending on who you listen to.

It struck me this week that one way to define how old you are is to ask how many times during your life the world has ended ... or been predicted to end. I am up to three. We now have 2012 because some ancient South American’s stopped counting on that date. Maybe. Apparently there are several ways to interpret their writings but only the disastrous end of the world makes good movies. Maybe not even “good movies” but movies which sell.

This week someone, very tongue in cheek, was talking about the 2012 theory so I, tongue out of check, suggested they give all their money to the church now so they could tell God they had done that!

Of course we all made it through the year 2000 — made it through to the surprise of some who predicted the end of the world, or at least the end of computers. Then there was the one, I think in the late 1970's? when the world was going to end at noon on a Thursday as I remember. Can’t remember the justification I just remember being in a Monday staff meeting when we decided we did not have to do any work that week since the world was ending anyway! Unfortunately our boss was not a believer.

I am not especially concerned with “end times” theology – more of my

reasoning later. What fascinates me is the what people pronounce as true and certain! The preaching and screaming and threatening .... all with ..... I try very hard not to be dismissive of other's beliefs. I try very hard not to "dis" ... disrespect others. But that is extremely hard in some of these circumstances.

For one thing most of the talk you hear takes the Bible like a bunch of leggo blocks. They take a couple verses from Revelation, one from Daniel – those two are fairly standard ... then add another Revelation verse, maybe jump to , or Matthew, or John and like a little kid with blocks they build the structure their imagination has created. .... OK, that was dismissive. Sorry.

Just a few minutes reading various preachers finds that each one puts the blocks together into different shapes. They are major verbal wars over whether Jesus will return at the beginning of a 1000 year period or at the end of the 1000 year period. You can combine passages to create either scenario. The third option, the one I believe, is that the whole 1000 year bit is metaphorical. .... But I certain cannot prove that.

Actually one of the most logically consistent predictions I have heard says the world will end in the year 2014. His explanation is based on the passage where Jesus says "this generation will not pass away before they see the second coming". (Matthew 24) He says the clock started when Israel was re-formed in 1949 and an average generation around the world is 65 years so that means the year 2014 is the key. .... At least that one holds together!

As I said, I am more fascinated by the preachers than the theology. Part of the reason for that is that they are ... in my opinion .... mis-leading people and

causing much more pain than joy. So my fascination is much like being fascinated by a serial killer. I wonder what could cause someone to do that.

As I attempt to understand I have been considering three possible explanations and I suspect most of the preachers have all three working. What is scary is that I found elements of all three in myself! And I suspect they are present in all of us — in varying degrees.

First is the need to understand. We very much want to understand. Furthermore we have been taught that if we just study enough we can learn anything. I guess I am lucky. Fairly early on I discovered I would never do well at multi-dimensional calculus no matter how much I tried! So I discovered there may be things I would never understand.

An example of the extreme need to understand & explain --- I was on a panel one time when the question was asked about where did Adam and Eve's sons find wives. Good thing the TV camera was on the other speaker because my mouth was hanging open as he "explained" that since women were not respected at that time, in truth Adam and Eve also had daughters who the sons married. And the "proof" was that the Bible mentions early prophets living hundreds of years whereas that no longer happens. With great smugness he concluded that science tells us that when siblings have children there will be DNA problems which result in shorter life spans!

Notice he just added daughters to scripture with no justification other than his desire to create an explanation. Furthermore, the DNA problems only occur if the DNA is not perfect – which in the real world it is not — but this "explanation"

requires that God created Adam and Eve with imperfect DNA. .... Interesting theology there.

Forget the strangeness of that theory. Notice the absolute need to explain scripture. Absolute need to explain God.

Second, and closely related, is the idea that the Bible, and God, are a puzzle that we can work out. The subtle difference between the first and second concepts is that the second believes it is all in the scripture if we just put it together in the right way. These are the leggo people! So just as I am in awe of people like Stephen Hawkings who think multi-dimensional calculus is easy .... we tend to be in awe of people who can explain what we don't understand.

Third, and possibly the one most of us is least captured by .... is the egotistical belief that we are so important to God's plans that there is **no way** ... no way at all God would just let us die as other people. We are so important to God that the end of the world and the second coming **MUST** happen during our life time. If they don't — why that just makes us .... like all the billions of other people who have died without the world ending.

Listen to some of those preachers and see if just maybe I have picked up on their sense of self importance. Personally I don't believe I am important enough to God to cause the world to end! Or not end.

The most dangerous is the need to understand and the belief that we should be able to understand. This can lead us to make intellectual jumps which are not

justified by scripture. I will step on some toes here — sorry. Please know I am expressing my opinion — the conclusions I have reached and they are NOT scriptural in the sense of being unchallengeable.

Where to begin? I believe there are no errors in the Bible. I firmly believe we frequently do not understand the Bible. So there are errors — just errors in our understanding.

I also am intrigued by the realization that parts of the Bible have been holy scripture for 3000 years or more, and I hope, will be for a long time to come. But ignore that for a moment and just think about our world today. The idea that the Bible is holy scripture for people traveling to the moon and for people who have never left the village they were born in. Holy scripture for people who read a book a day, and for people who cannot read their own name. Holy scripture for people who grew up being told about Jesus and for people who have never heard the name. .... Holy scripture for all of those.

Now, if we were writing religious text books we would write very different ones for each of those groups. We would approach the concepts of war, hunger, giving, worship — and a thousand other topics in different ways. The teachings would or should remain the same but the explanations would vary. BUT, God if you will, did not have or take that flexibility but instead produced one book which can .... when understood .... apply in all those various circumstances.

Example ... the story of Abraham and Isaac where Abraham is sent to sacrifice - to kill Isaac. To our ears it is a brutal story about a capacious God.

The explanation that God was simply testing Abraham's obedience has never helped me or made me feel closer to God through it.

BUT .... and I like this explanation which does NOT make it correct ..... if we remember that when this was recorded human sacrifice was common ... then all of a sudden we have a teaching – in the cultural context — understood by the people of that culture, a teaching was says human sacrifice is not desired.

Or the prohibition against eating pork or shell fish. Those are both “bottom feeders” — they eat the garbage left behind. So if you do not have the science to test them or the cooking stoves to cook them thoroughly, then not eating them is good advice!

Let me give you some of my thoughts on Bible understanding first, and then end of time.

I begin with the belief that a God who can fit between my ears is a mighty small God!! A God I can fully understand is a mighty small God. That is not said with an excessive amount of humbleness — I am confident in my intellect. And frankly it is not said easily — I hate it when I cannot understand! Even multi-dimensional calculus. But it is said with realism that God is greater and smarter than I am.

I remember playing a basketball game one time and the coach had a certain game plan. I did not understand his reasoning for the game plan so I did what I thought best. We lost. .... I think back on that often when I am confused about

God!

But I also believe God WANTS to be understood. Just as Stephen Hawkings writes books for the layperson .... I think I understood “A Brief History of Time” .... actually I didn’t. Just like a human expert trying to explain things to those of us not as knowledgeable ... God is trying to explain, very much WANTS us to understand. But we are limited. I especially do not understand all the killing and violence in the Old Testament. God better be ready because I will ask about them !

But saying God has explaining to do is very different from saying there is no good explanation. I suspect many of the questions are answered by the context which I do not understand, and the type of literature — what was really history and what is metaphorical. There may even be places where we TOTALLY miss the point. When Paul says “women should be silent in church” – when we take time to read the passage it sounds as if that is a question he was presented with, and then answers in the negative ... or even a bit of sarcasm thrown at those arguing that way.

I once had a debate with a real fundamentalist who attacked the Episcopal church for allowing women to speak in church. “Women should be silent in church” he thundered! To which I said, “I better never hear a soprano in your choir!”

I think a therapist would call that my dark side.

Bottom line regarding scripture — I believe God wants us to understand and **THEREFORE** God does not hide important teachings by scattering them throughout the Bible. I don't believe God wrote the Bible so only a person with a computer could uncover the Bible code. Statistics 101 says that's a bunch of baloney!

I don't believe God hides major teachings so you had to literally cut and paste pieces together like a kid building with leggo blocks.

And I base that belief on the belief that God wants us to understand. Don't accept or reject my thoughts or the thoughts of others without checking it all out. Two great books I can recommend are "End Times" by Dr. Mickey Efirid and "the Rapture Exposed" by Dr. Barbara Rossing — both go into depth on what scripture actually says. I am confident in my intellect but also absolutely sure I don't know all that everyone else in the world has learned. Other people know things I don't know so I study to learn them.

Regarding end times ... eschatology ... I **know** without any doubt at all that the world will end in the only way that matters ..... when I die the world will end in the only way that matters to me. If the earth and humans are still around 10,000 years from now — what do I care?

As I read Jesus teachings, as well as those in Revelation and Daniel and Ephesians etc. I don't know if they apply to the world at large. I do know they apply to me. I don't think it matters to any of us if the world will end in 2012 ... because God has told us to live as if it will end today. My comment to the person

saying the world will end in 2012? That he should give away all his money now? That was aiming at this point – not that we should give all our money away but that we should live as if the world is about to end .... because it is .... for us.

Unlike some of those preachers I disrespected, I don't say that as a threat. Rather as a way of stressing how important it is to be close to God. How wonderful, and joyful it is so why wait until the last minute?

The Bible is a challenge – but mostly it is a great gift. It is a love letter from God to you. Try reading it from THAT perspective.

AMEN

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