

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

May 24, 2015

“The End Is Not Near”



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister
Velna Pitts: Lay Reader

Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

Acts 2:17-21

“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Mark 13:21-27, 32;

And if anyone says to you at that time, “Look! Here is the Messiah!” or “Look! There he is!”—do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything. ‘But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. ‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

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“The End Is Not Near”

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An old preacher lay dying in his bed. He sent for a banker and a lawyer, both members of his church, to come to his home. As they entered his bedroom, the preacher held out his hands and motioned for them to sit on each side of his bed. The preacher grasped their hands, sighed contentedly, smiled, and stared up at the ceiling. Both the banker and the lawyer were touched and flattered that the preacher would ask them to be with him during his final moments. They were also puzzled. The preacher had

never given them any indication that he particularly liked either of them. They both remembered his many long, uncomfortable sermons about greed, that made them squirm in their pews. Finally, the banker said, "Preacher, why did you ask us to come?" The old preacher said, "Jesus died between two thieves, and that's how I want to go." (My apologies to any bankers or lawyers in the congregation. I especially want to apologize to my daughter, who's thinking about becoming a lawyer, and to my wife, whose father was a banker. So I'll probably be in trouble after church.)

The end is not near! That's what I want to talk with you about today. The end is not near! Whether you're a preacher or a parishioner. The end is not near! Whether you're a banker or a lawyer. The end is not near! Whether you're male or female. The end is not near! (Say to those around you: The end is not near! The end is not near! The end is not near!) I know this is not where the money is. If I wanted to make money, I would say: The end is near! The end is near! The end is near! Then I would predict when the end date would be. And then I would say: Send me your money! Because the end is near! Your money won't do you any good when the end comes. But I'm not saying that. I'm saying: The end is not near! And since today is the day we celebrate Pentecost, the gift of the spirit to the people two thousand years ago, which some theologians call the birth of the church, it should come as good news that the end is not near.

Scientists tell us the end is near. If you consider about 2 billion years from now to be "near." Scientists say eventually the sun will get a lot hotter. Scientists say it will be so hot that the earth will be uninhabitable. Personally, I believe 109 degrees in Southern California is uninhabitable. Which is why Kathleen and I will go back to Michigan for a few weeks this summer.

Some religious people don't seem to pay much attention to what scientists say. Scientists say the earth is billions of years old. Some religious people say: Nope, the earth is 6,000 years old. Scientists say that humans evolved from other creatures over hundreds of millions of years. Some religious people say: Nope, God created humans fully formed during a six-day period 6,000 years ago. Scientists say global warming or climate change is

real. Some religious people and others say: Nope, global warming or climate change is a hoax. Which is why it's so easy to convince some religious people, over and over and over again, that the end is near, because they're so gullible. Harold Camping predicted that the end is near a couple times a few years ago. And many gullible people believed him. It turned out that he was right. At least he was right about the end being near - for him. He died in 2013 at the age of 92.

The Bible talks about the end times. The Bible says there will be blood and fire and smoky mist in the heavens and the earth. The Bible says the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood. The Bible says all this will happen before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Jesus talked about the end times. Jesus said there will be false messiahs and false prophets. Jesus said the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from heaven. Jesus said then the Son of Man will come in the clouds with great power and glory. But Jesus said nobody knows when the end times will come, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son of Man, but only the Father. Jesus also said not to be concerned about the future. Jesus said, "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own." (Not that that's very comforting.)

Moral decay in the present day, some religious people say, means that the end is near. Is the moral decay in the present day that some religious people speak of the fact that the monetary gap is widening between the Have Nots and the Have Lots? Is the moral decay in the present day that some religious people speak of the fact that women make only 77 cents for every dollar that a man makes for doing the same job? Is the moral decay in the present day that some religious people speak of the fact that the minimum wage is not enough to keep full-time workers above the poverty line? No, no, and no. The moral decay in the present day that some religious people speak of is the fact that women have the right to control their own bodies. The moral decay in the present day that some religious people speak of is the fact that one person now has the right to marry another person of the same sex. The moral decay in the present day that some religious people speak of is the fact that a black man is in the White House. But if moral decay in the United States of America was

going to lead to the end times on earth, wouldn't the end times on earth have come during the 400 years of slavery in the United States of America? Or during the lynching's of blacks after slavery? Or during the genocide of the American Indians?

Jack Van Impe is a televangelist in the Detroit area. His wife's name is Rexella. I'm not making that up. Rexella. Maybe you've seen them on TV. Jack Van Impe considers himself to be a prophet. He's always prophesying that the end is near. He sees signs of the end times all over the place. He sees the end times coming, if there's a three-car pile-up on I-94. (And if I-94 were in California, it would be called The 94.) John Hagee is another televangelist. He's out of San Antonio, Texas. John Hagee also considers himself to be a prophet. He sees signs of the end times, too. He sees the end times coming whenever there are wars or rumors of wars in the Middle East. The Middle East is where the Bible declares the end times will begin.

Some televangelists and other Christian ministers seem to be hoping for some kind of conflict in the Middle East, which they then hope will lead to WWII, and nuclear bombs going off all over the place. Because then they believe Jesus will come back to earth among the clouds, perhaps even among the mushroom clouds. I never have been able to figure out why some televangelists and other Christian ministers seem so eager for the end times to come. Because if the book of Revelation is true, there'll be lots of suffering on the earth when the end times come, like for a thousand years. While some televangelists and other Christian ministers believe they will be spared from that suffering - and will be raptured right up to heaven - why would they want, why would they seemingly take delight in, the suffering of others for a thousand years? Then there's the proclamation in the book of Revelation that Jesus will come back to earth and kill all of his enemies. But why would a guy who told us to love our enemies, come back and kill all of his supposed enemies? And why would a God who gave us the Rainbow Covenant after the Great Flood, promising to never again destroy the people of the earth, allow the people of the earth to be destroyed?

“Peter Pan” is the J. M. Barrie story about the boy who didn’t want to grow up. Peter Pan lived in Neverland, which you get to by taking the “Second star to the right and straight on till morning.” Many of us remember watching the Mary Martin version of “Peter Pan” on TV. Or seeing the Disney cartoon version of “Peter Pan.” We remember that Peter Pan never did grow up. But his friend Wendy did. And Wendy says to Peter toward the end of the story, after she is all grown up, “I am old Peter. I am ever so much more than 20.”

Many of us are, “ever so much more than 20.” So I don’t want to make light of the idea that “The end is near!” Because I know for some of us the end is nearer than for others of us. But that’s why I don’t understand some televangelists and other Christian ministers who are all worried about the end times. Because I thought that those televangelists and Christian ministers believed that the Good News is that the end times are not the end! I certainly believe that our end is our beginning. Or at least our continuation of eternal life. I believe when our end time comes we will take the “Second star to the right and straight on till morning.” Or straight on till heaven. Whichever comes first.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to not worry about the end times.
Help us to believe that the end is not near.
And help us to know that our end is our beginning.
Now and forevermore. By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*



Menifee
United Church of Christ





THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism