



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

CANADIAN MEMORIAL CHURCH  
& CENTRE FOR PEACE

Preached by Rev. Sophia Ducey

Mark 13:1-8; 12-19; 24-37

Libera Me, Verdi's Requiem

November 15, 2009

24th Sunday after Pentecost

## “The Call of Chaos”

Tomorrow, *text by John Henry Mackay;*  
*song by Richard Strauss*

And tomorrow the sun will shine  
again,  
and on the path I will take,  
it will unite us again, we happy ones,  
upon this sun-breathing earth...

And to the shore, the wide shore with  
blue waves,  
we will descend quietly and slowly;  
we will look mutely into each other's  
eyes  
and the silence of happiness will settle  
upon us.

Tomorrow – Will there be a  
tomorrow? What will it look like? Will  
we come together in Love? With the  
Divine? With all beings?

When I left my Presbyterian church in  
1981 to attend the University of  
California, Santa Barbara, after  
spending a year with our church youth  
group studying Revelation, I never  
thought I'd be doing a sermon on the  
Apocalypse. And when I answered the  
Call to ministry just after 9-11-2001  
when I lived one mile from the  
Pentagon as it was hit, I still did not  
think I would be doing a sermon on  
end times, environmental and

planetary change, and the Call of the  
Chaos.

I find it interesting that for my first  
sermon here at Canadian Memorial,  
the Lectionary had on its schedule  
John 3:16 – “For God so loved the  
world...” - a Bible reading I did a  
sermon on in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade as part of our  
Youth Sunday. In August this year, I  
was gifted with Lectionary readings  
that had corresponding supportive  
readings in the Wisdom texts.

And now I find myself on a Sunday  
with an Apocalyptic reading, following  
a month where mass devastation by  
earthquakes and storms have been  
seen around the world at  
unprecedented levels; on a weekend  
that the “2012” movie comes out,  
bringing forth its own theories on the  
end of the world based Hollywood's  
interpretation of the predictions of the  
Mayan calendar; and next week, we  
bring together people from various  
spiritual and religious traditions to  
contemplate the question:

*Is the current environmental  
crisis  
one of the most pressing  
spiritual challenges of our  
times?*

When I saw the Lectionary options, I decided to ride the wave of destiny and speak to the Call that all this Chaos seems to be ringing in our ears.

The end of an age is clearly in sight in this week's reading from Mark's gospel. Nothing that seems established will remain standing: not the temple, nor nations, nor the land, nor the sky will exist as they did. Everything is shaken. And the shaking itself, Jesus warns, is just birth pangs and just the beginning of the turmoil to be experienced.

In so describing the inevitability of such shaking on a global scale, Jesus is not calling for passivity. We can no more be silent in the face of threats of war, climate change or earth shifts than we can be silent in the face of any injustice, oppression or disaster. We have work to do, now and always. And in the face of whatever the suffering is, what the Spirit reveals to us now, is the calling of our time.

9-11 served as a wake-up call for many. Following 9-11, many people answered the call of Unity and came together in community to support each other, to be more kind, to dialogue to bring peace within diversity. In the U.S., we were also bombarded with messages of revenge and war, with surveillance planes circling for weeks, and Code Red and Orange in our airports for months. In addition, in the DC area following 9-11, we were plagued with Anthrax being mailed through our local U.S. Postal offices, and then a sniper who positioned himself outside places like Home Depot, gas stations

and elementary schools, and shot and killed local residents.

Last Tuesday the State of Virginia once again remained asleep and used the death penalty to kill the sniper to send the message that killing is wrong. Less than a week before, an army psychiatrist shot and killed 13 people at Fort Hood military base in Texas, and injured 30 others. Brother against brother, parent against child. Are these the "signs" written about in Mark and other prophecies? Is this the beginning of the "birth pangs"?

When we see "signs" that seem similar to Biblical references or prophetic writings, we want to know as the disciples wanted to know from Jesus, "When will this come to be? When will the world end? How will we know?" Jesus' reply – *You will not know. So Be Alert. Wake-up! Be Prepared. It's gonna get bad. That's just the way it is. The "temples" of our world will be thrown down, wars will happen, people will betray each other, and the sun and the moon will darken.*

So why bother? Who wants to be awake for all this?! Maybe we should just adorn our eye patches, and leave in our earplugs, hoping to get an extra hour of sleep away from the catastrophes of life.

We could be like the family Elizabeth Ward heard about when she moved to Canada – they saw the "signs" and believed the prophetic teachers of the time, and they went to their rooftop at the appointed time, without preparations for the winter, since they "knew" they would be taken in the

rapture. Or like the community who supported the roof-top family when the rapture did not come, giving them food and being the grace of God expressed that winter.

What we will do, individually and collectively? As the environmental changes happen more rapidly, as the Earth changes continue to escalate, who will we be? What will we do? Will we obediently follow the orders of archaic texts or modern leaders? Will we Be Alert, and listen for the guidance of Wisdom calling us into compassion and community? What is the new level of consciousness we are being called to wake up to in these times of tribulation?

I watched a David Suzuki documentary on Friday evening. His daughter Sarika shared that as a little girl, all she heard from her parents was that things were bad, the people had ruined the Earth and the politicians were not to be trusted. When asked by her father to participate in a program to help the planet, she asked, "Why bother? Isn't it too late?" It was then that David Suzuki realized he had to Wake Up to a new way of being an activist for the environment, one who focused less on identifying the "problem" and the "signs" of doom & gloom, and instead focused more on inspiring hope and action in people of all ages. We are blessed in Canada, and in particular Vancouver, that he received this Wake Up call and to have him continue to ring the daily wake-up alarm for all of us. He hosted an event for Elders and the Environment last week, continuing his message of "Be Alert" and "Be

Prepared" – not just for ourselves, but for all beings, of all ages, and all kinds.

The reading from Mark asks us to consider the future of our planet. Written in the shadow of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, Mark Chapter 13 speaks of human violence and natural upheaval as foreshadowing the coming of the Son of Man. People of today's world know much about war and rumors of war and have witnessed natural disasters, but seldom do we identify them with divine activity or the end of history.

How shall we read these texts, if we personally reject a second coming of Christ or the first-century worldview? Is the future destruction and re-creation of our planet pre-ordained? As we look at our own precarious future, what is our appropriate response – passivity in the face of fate - or active engagement in the context of a dangerous, but open future?

Apocalyptic forecasts often intrigue us. The Matrix trilogy (which I watched again this week) is a dramatic display of the fight against the end of time, and the hope in "The One's" ability to save Zion. It took the whole community of those who had "woken up" to stand up and do the work they were called to do to save the human race and their habitat within the planet. The ending scene is the Oracle and the Architect confirming the Architect's agreement – that all those who wish to awaken will be allowed to do so, to awaken from an illusory life within the Matrix.

Is this the promise that is available for all of us – that we can wake up, and live a life awake and aware of the choices we make and the consequences that follow? Do we want to be that awake? Is that the “new world” that awaits us? After we weather the storms and devastation of our modern world, ones we have created with our mis-use of the planet, and ones that planet is experiencing in her own cycles, is this the new world that we are co-creating with the Divine? A world of awakened choice and responsibility for the good of all?

Just yesterday, I saw the movie “2012,” Hollywood’s take on the prophecies from the Mayan calendar. People still try to interpret Nostradamus and Revelation as textbooks for the final days of Planet Earth. While taking these texts too seriously may lead to despair and passivity, they remind us of our personal and planetary vulnerability. We always live between the contrasting poles of security and vulnerability.

I was struck by the various interplays of values, beliefs and consciousness. There were scenes of conspiracy and withholding of information, and tender scenes of families with love and reconciliation. Big decisions to make – save oneself, or save another, or who gets saved? Which lives have value? And what gives them value? Money? Knowledge? Prestige? The most poignant question of the movie for me was something like this: “How will it be if we create a new world upon an act of cruelty?” A great shift happens based on this question.

In today’s world, many fear what the future will bring and see ourselves helpless in relationship to forces beyond our control. Although we may not expect a Second Coming or a divine rescue operation when the going gets rough, we can have hope and faith that God is with us, energizing us and calling us to life-saving and planetary-transforming action in our own perilous time. We are part of a larger Divine Holy Adventure in which our actions shape the future of the planet and our own futures.

Where are we seeing birth pangs in our world today? What is the Greater Reality that we must wake up to and prepare for? Do we choose hope, in the face of planetary shifts? Do we come together in community, all beings, all faiths, and answer the call of Unity with each other and our planet? Do we surrender our hopelessness to the Divine of our Being, and open up to the Hope of Wisdom to guide and provide us with the courage and the will to do that which we are called to do for our planet, for all our kin?

This coming weekend I invite you to participate in the conference Canadian Memorial is hosting on the Environment and Spirit. Come together with people of various spiritual and religious beliefs to explore what is happening on our planet and its relationship to a spiritual crises within many. As we explore the role of our spiritual beliefs in inspiring and supporting our passions for the environment, we open the possibility of deepening our faith and trust in the

Divine and its role in the further evolution of our planet and all its inhabitants.

I believe we as a community are being called to be awake and aware. To be more aware in each moment of the presence of Spirit. To wake up to the Divine impulse within to care for others and our planet. We must create systems of communication and care that truly connect us, in times of joy and celebration, and in times of sorrow or turmoil. There are already so many programs of pastoral care and community outreach here. Let's continue to look at how we create a sustainable community, within Canadian Memorial and within our city. Let's contemplate for a moment possible times without all the conveniences of our modern world. Are we prepared to serve others and the planet in tumultuous times? Do we have systems in place to connect, create cooperative community, and to uplift each other in times of need?

Can we stand forth as a community to engage the Kin(g)dom of Heaven on Earth, in consciousness and in form? Are we awake and aware of the perpetual light of God that shines through us and all beings?

**Liberate Me** (From Verdi's Requiem – interpreted by Susan McCaslin)

Liberate me, O Lord, from  
hopelessness  
On that tremulous day  
when the heavens and earth quake,  
when you shall come

to expose the desires of all hearts.

I am seized by shaking,  
and I fear till Holy Wisdom comes  
with her clear discernment.  
Free us from the toils and tangles  
of the false self.

Day of Awe, hour of disaster and  
divisiveness,  
day of upheaval, and misery,  
momentous day,  
hard for the hardened,  
when You shall come to transfigure  
all hearts in your refining fire.

Eternal peace grant everyone, Lord.  
And let perpetual light shine in us  
and all beings.

May it be so, always and in all ways.