

Reflection for Sunday, November 18, 2018, by Ewelina Frackowiak

Readings: Daniel 12.1-3; Hebrews 10.11-14, 18; Mark 13.24-32

Isn't this a terrifying message which we have just heard from the Gospels? I bet every generation that heard Jesus' warning must have wondered: Is that during our lifetimes that the world will end? The Trump administration must be thinking the world will end soon. Why do I suspect that? Here is a fact: The administration justified its recent decision to remove a rule requiring greater fuel efficiency for cars and trucks by predicting that, by the end of the century, global temperatures will have risen by almost 4 degrees Celsius.¹ In other words: Since the global warming will happen anyway, why should we limit ourselves and not drive S.U.V.s? The thing is that a 4-degree rise will be devastating to our planet.

Both the Gospel and the news are not cheerful today, to say the least.

For a start, let me try to find some cheer in good news.

The way we ordinarily perceive the world is not the way the world really is. We see it usually from the perspective of our judgement and preferences, our fears and our ideas of how things should be.² And because our judgment and our emotions shift, the world as we see it changes as well. One day it may seem to you as a hostile, unsupportive place where everyone is against you. Another time the world may seem to you as a bleak and boring place. Sometimes it is a world of rat races, in which you feel you must constantly compare yourself to others and compete; sometimes it is a blissful world in which it goes without saying that YOU have the right tastes, the right way of life. While living in such world you do not see suffering that is happening outside of your circle.

So the good news is that as we shift between these worlds daily, we do already experience world endings. The end depicted in today's Gospel does not have to be that terrifying. I gave us example of illusions created by our mind; there are also illusory worlds presented to us by our senses. The way we experience the world through our senses is not how the world really is. Things are not intrinsic. Modern particle physics shows us that matter is mostly made out of space and so its solidity is a perceptual illusion. Mystics tell us that perceiving ourselves as separate entities is a distortion of reality.

¹ Kolbert, E. Global Warning. *The New Yorker*. October 22, 2018, p. 23

² Almaas, A. H. (1999). *Facets of Unity: The Enneagram of Holy Ideas*. Berkeley, Diamond Books, p. 141

Will recognizing that we may be operating within realities that we ourselves create benefit us? And among these shifting worlds and perceptions, is there something constant, indestructible and everlasting?

By training in becoming aware of the different worlds and illusions, we become less and less identified with them. We do not suffer as much when they leave us; we are less inclined to blame other people for making us miserable. By training in seeing through our mental states, we are able to get in touch with our Essence, which is in fact indestructible and imperishable. What some writers call Essence, the Gospels present to us as the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven. “The kingdom of God is within you” – said Jesus to the Pharisees³. The apocryphal Gospel found in Oxyrhynchus has Jesus saying: “The kingdom (of heaven) is within you: and (whosoever) knoweth (...) shall find it (...) know yourselves.”⁴

The fragment of the Gospel we have just heard continues with Jesus’ advice: Be watchful! Be alert!⁵

When I was in sixth grade, my teacher read us one day a poem titled “A Song on the End of the World”.⁶ Just to give you a context to this story: that teacher happened to be the only known atheist living in my hometown in Poland and I was on guard. You know how it goes, people say: “oh, so and so, nobody sees her at church”, and that’s enough for you at the tender age of 13 to condemn her in your head as strongly as strongly you yourself fear being seen as a freak. The poem we heard that day depicts an idyllic scene: a bee circles a clover, a fisherman mends his net, the voice of a violin lasts in the air, and so on until someone announces: There will be no end of the world other than this. This is it. I was stunned. It was undoubtedly some sort of atheist agenda...

Speaking about an end of a world – here we have an example of one. The world as seen by the 13-year-old me, world that was simple and could be managed by following strong convictions has ended. When and how? I am not able to tell you. I only know that when I think of myself in grade sixth reacting to the poem, I am shocked. Was that really me? I can assure you nowadays I do not feel a need to check literary works against Catholic dogma. The world out there seems to be more complex than the one the

³ Luke 17:21, King James Bible

⁴ James, M. R. (1953). *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford University Press, p. 26

⁵ Mark 13:33

⁶ Milosz, Cz. (1988). A Song on the End of the World. *The Collected Poems: 1931-1987*. The Ecco Press. Also available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49451/a-song-on-the-end-of-the-world><https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49451/a-song-on-the-end-of-the-world>

13-year-old was seeing and reacting to. But is it the real world? I, like everyone else, have to be watchful.