

Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

There is a new movie out that I have not yet had a chance to go see. It is one of those mayhem and destruction movies that the world is coming to an end. It also happens to star one of my favorite actors, John Cusack. The movie is called "2012" and is based on a supposition of a dead culture, and a couple of thousand year old astronomical dating system. According to the premise of the movie, which is also the premise of a lot of authors, bloggers and wackos, the world as we know it is going to be destroyed on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December in the year 2012.

The genesis of that date is all tied up is all tied up with the Mayan calendar. I am sure that you all remember from your junior high social studies class all about the Mayans. Just in case you don't, I did some reading on this to try to give us, if not an accurate accounting, something that sounds fairly intelligent, but not sounding like I'm quoting directly from Wikipedia.

So, the Mayans: they were the Mezzo-American people living in what we know today as Central America. That would be southern Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvadore, western Honduras, and parts of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. They were really active from about 250 - 900 C.E. Then for reasons that no one has really yet determined, or fully understood, they went into civilization meltdown. So by the 1200's the descendants really didn't have much of a memory of the former glory of the people. When the Spaniards showed up in the 1500's, they were up against not the Mayans, but against the Incas. The Mayan civilization has been in obscurity for several hundred years. It's really in just the last 150 years, or so, that we have really started to uncover something, or began to understand anything about the Mayan culture.

But, back to the calendar. The Mayans, at their height, were phenomenal. They had cities; they had roads; they had writings; and they had a government that worked. They developed a calendar that not only went *back* thousands of years, but it also went *forward* about a thousand and a half years or so. Again, let me stress, I am **not** a scholar in this era, but as I understand reading about this, the Mayan way of looking at time is very similar to the Jewish way of looking at time, in that they look at time as being circular. The Western, European, and North American concept of time tends to be straight line, or linear. Mayan is circular - it goes around and around and around.

Now they group these patterns (days as we would call them) differently from the way that we do. They were very accurate with their astrological calendar, they even figured out that a solar year is 365.24 days long, but they grouped days into units of 20, which were then grouped into units of 18, which were then grouped back into units of 20s a couple of more times, so that one cycle lasted 394.25 years (there is no quiz; don't worry, you don't have to remember all these numbers). When you put all that together, when you take all those cycles and put them into the great big cycle that they call their Long Count Calendar, that's when you get the complete cycle of 5,126 years.

This calendar that they came up with (remember this was 900 C.E.) is incredibly accurate in predicting when the winter solstice will occur. Which I think is an amazingly cool thing, since I don't know what I

am doing today without my calendar, my handheld, and my cell phone, let alone predict what I am doing next week. They were able to predict these particular dates thousands of years. So the Long Count Calendar, based on the way that we do dates in the Gregorian calendar, the end of their long-count calendar happens to be the solstice, the winter solstice, of our year 2012 or 12/21/2012.

Now, the Mayan way of thinking didn't have those particular numbers. They didn't know that our calendar was going to be based on the supposed date of when the birth of Christ happened. They didn't have, 12/21/2012, that doesn't mean a whole lot to the Mayans because that is not what they were figuring. But when European and North American scholars start looking at all these calendars, and they see all those numbers, and a couple of numbers repeated over and over again, they start thinking: 'what do the Mayans know that we don't that they put all these numbers together? Why does their calendar end? Is the world going to end? What's going to happen to civilization? What do all those numbers mean? They repeat so often, so therefore they must have some extra special meaning or significance to the Mayans.'

There are those folks who are have great anxiety over this date. Other folks, who aren't even scholars, who are saying, "Will the world be destroyed?" or "Will there be a new spiritually enlightened age that begins?" There is real, honest anxiety coming up because of this date.

I read a blurb the other day. It was a quote from a NASA Astrobiology Institute scientist. His name is David Morrison and I read this off of the National Geographic Website. David Morrison said concerning the 2012 fears, "I've had two teenagers who were considering killing themselves because they didn't want to be around when the world ends. Two women in the last two weeks said they were contemplating killing their children and themselves, so they wouldn't have to suffer through the end of the world." <sup>1</sup>

I did a quick web search on "Mayan calendar 2012," and on the first page I got these great web sites:

- [December 21 2012.com](#): "Features the Mayan proposed end of the world date. It includes articles on the date's relationship and various scientific data and philosophies."
- [Survive 2012.com](#) is "dedicated to surviving the 2012 apocalypse. Includes forum, science blogs, news updates and articles about ancient history."
- This is a really great one - [End of the World 2012 Countdown Timer](#). You can put this one on the desktop of your computer. That's what I want to know!
- [End of the World 2012](#) - "Doomsday Prophecies plus something more fearful than any December 2012 end. . . (the) Mayan calendar 2012 points to the end of the world."

There were also in addition to these, let me politely say "wackos," these websites:

- [Mayan prophecy 2012 - The Skeptic's Dictionary](#) "the world will not end on 12-21-2012, at least not according to the Maya."
- and of course the [National Geographic](#) as they try to debunk photos of some asteroids that are supposedly slamming into the planets that people are saying that NASA doesn't want us to know about.

There is this atmosphere of fear and doomsday that is so prevalent, not only on the web, but many authors, newscasters, pundits, televangelists, preachers, and other various and sundry "wackos." All of these folks are absolutely convinced that the world, or at least western civilization as we know it, is about to end.

For Jeremiah, that end of the world concept was not just something that was “out there.” It was very, very real. For Jeremiah and the people of Judah, there in the city of Jerusalem, the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen about 180 years before Jeremiah’s time. The Syrians had come in and they were the Borg - they assimilated the Northern Kingdom, and that was no longer around. The Babylonians were now breathing down the necks of those people there in Jerusalem, and Jeremiah had been preaching that ‘you have turned away from God; you are not following the Lord God Almighty.’ So the people, often led by their king, were turning away from the Lord and instead were following their own wants, their own desires, the latest fads and desires, and the most current theories. Yes, they went to temple, and sure, they did their prescribed sacrifices, but they also did the sixth century equivalent of searching the web, watching mindless television, and ignoring folks who were in true need. In other words, the people of Judah in Jeremiah’s day truly excelled at that wonderful 21<sup>st</sup> century axiom of “Looking Out for Number One.”

‘Beware,’ says Jeremiah, ‘for the Lord God Almighty will let bad things happen to us because we have turned away. There is good news,’ Jeremiah goes on to say. ‘There is good news, because the Lord God is not going to abandon us, the Lord God is not only going to stay with us, but the Lord God will return that righteous branch to the soul and will lead us all into faithfulness. So don’t be anxious,’ Jeremiah says. ‘Follow the Lord our God. Be prepared for some rough times, but remember that God is with us.’

Similar to that message is the one we heard Jesus give to the disciples, this morning. In the gospel lesson the people have already lived through the exile. They know their own history. They know that the northern kingdom of Israel fell. They knew that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. They also knew that the Persians allowed Jerusalem to be rebuilt. They know that they are faithfully doing their sacrifices there in the temple. They have the Romans and they’re a bit on the oppressive side, but they don’t really see the end of time coming anytime soon. It would be great if the Romans would be gone, but the end of the world? Not so much.

Then along comes this Jesus character. He is an interesting kind of a teacher. He knows that *his* end is in sight, he knows that *his* days are numbered, even though he was hailed as the king just a few days prior to his entry into Jerusalem in the Gospel. This Jesus starts talking about what to look for, so that people will know that the end is truly upon them. We get this vague description that there will be “signs in the sun, and the moon, and the stars and on earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world for the powers of heaven will be shaken.” (vs.25-27) **When** in our written history has they’re never been a time like that?

Then Jesus launches in with this “wonderful” parable about the fig leaves, that makes *oh so much* sense to us post modern 21<sup>st</sup> century North Americans. Fig leaves! We’re supposed to be preparing for the end of times, when we see fig leaves growing—come on!

Finally we get something that makes sense. “Be on guard,” Jesus says. “Be on guard so your heart is not weighed down with drunkenness and worries of this life that the day might catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. It will come upon all who live upon the face of the earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you might have the strength to escape all these things that will take place.” (Vs.34-36)

Why do I say that that makes sense? Because he says, ‘Don’t be weighed down with the worries of life.’ By that he does not mean that we will never have problems. It does not mean that we will always be gainfully employed; it does not mean that we will always the latest and greatest electronic gadgets that

we're lusting after, or that all of our relationships will always work out. Or perhaps to put it in the more immediate setting of Thanksgiving, it does not mean that your turkey will never burn, that everyone will get along at the table, and that your team will always win.

What Jesus **is** getting at here, is simply: Pay Attention. Keep an eye on the turkey while it's cooking. Don't let Uncle Jim sit next to Aunt Mary. And don't worry about the game. Instead, concentrate on getting along with each other. Concentrate on being a good friend, a loving family member, an honest steward of your resources. All the while, be on the lookout, be watchful: but don't get obsessive about it.

So, back to that Mayan calendar thing. Did it sound at all a little bit familiar to you? Maybe some of you remember something about ten-ish years ago? Can you say, Y2K? I remember the anxiety, the anticipation, preparation, and planning that people were putting forth waiting for January 1, of the year 2000. At the time I lived in Northumberland County where a local businessman put an eight page ad out in the Sunbury newspaper. Eight pages listing all of the reasons that the world, as we knew it, was about to end. To back up his point of view he had pages of scriptural quotes from the book of Daniel, the book of Revelation, and from the various Gospels. All of which were telling us that the end of times was upon us, that Christ is about to return, and how we need to be prepared by accepting Jesus Christ as our personal saviour. These were all fine axioms upon which to strive for, but it wasn't exactly the best Christian theology from a Lutheran point of view. Remember what happened with that whole Y2K scare. Can we say: Nothing?

What do I think about the year 2012 with the Mayan calendar and the end of that Long count cycle? Do I really think that destruction is going to happen? Probably not. Do I think we should be prepared? Well, no more so than I prepare myself every day. That is to say, prepare myself so that I might live as a witness for Christ, so that I might strive to treat other people in the manner in which I want to be treated. Prepare myself to thank God for the grace of salvation offered through the death and resurrection of Christ. Prepare myself and, as best as I can those around me, for the return, that is to say, the *Advent* of Christ.

Be ready, Jesus says. Not for mayhem and destruction. Be ready for Christ's new world.

Amen.

---

i.<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2009/11/091106-2012-movie-end-world-fears-maya-predictions.html>

Copyright © 2009, John H. Brock. All rights reserved.