



It's the End of the World as We Know It (and I Feel Fine)

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (12/05/25)

On a dark winter night in 1983, I twisted and turned the tuning knob on the car radio in my Reliant K searching out music that fit my mood. The bright dial hit 103.3 FM, the college station of Princeton University, and my car filled with “Radio Free Europe” from the album Murmur by the indie band REM. An avid fan from the moment I heard the song, I belong to a class of early REM fans called “murmurers.”

Much later, REM released a song called “The End of the World as We Know It (and I Feel Fine),” which has become my touchstone whenever scripture turns to final things. With faith in the Risen Jesus, we disciples face all endings as new beginnings! We face all endings as birth pangs of new life. We are eager to shed the world-as-it-is, or at least the yet unredeemed parts of the world-as-it-is, in order to be ushered into the Kingdom of God. For the disciple, the end of the world as we know it is cause for hope, and anticipation.

During elementary school, I kept a Bible on my bedside table both as reading material and as a totem to help me feel safe. The very 1970s Living Bible had an avocado green spine and an impressionistic depiction of Jesus the Good Shepherd in earth tones on the cover. From time to time, I would dare myself to read from the Revelation to St. John before bedtime because it is full of fearsome imagery and cataclysmic events, the apocalyptic return of Jesus.

My immature brain did not yet know that Apocalypse simply means ‘unveiling’ and that all of these scary images were actually a sophisticated way for St. John the Divine to write to the seven churches in a language that the Roman authorities would not understand. Essentially, the oppressed community of Jesus was using coded language to encourage endurance, resistance and hope during a time of persecution by the dominating powers of the time.

Indeed, on a careful reading we will find comfort and cause for hope. The lamb on the throne of the new heaven and earth is the lamb that was slain. Not a figure of dominating might and capricious authority, the lamb is gentle, self-sacrificing and the

source of our reunion with God. In addition, when the new Jerusalem arrives it comes down to earth from heaven, recreating a new heaven and earth in this world. The end of the world ushers in the restoration of earth with God at the center as God always wanted.

During Advent we prepare for the arrival of God in Jesus once again. The good news is that we already know how God chose to arrive as a naked, helpless child of poor parents in a stable. We know that God ends the world-as-it-is and starts over in the most gentle possible way that affirms the human project by embracing humanity fully. So let our preparation be according to what we know: Let us pray for grace to soften our hearts, decrease our defenses, erase our cynicism, and grow our risky, vulnerable, daring faith and hope.