

The mistake is when

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Earlier this week I e-mailed my parents an article from NPR that caught my attention: "[It's Never Too Soon To Plan Your 'Driving Retirement.'](#)" Using the story of a 94-year-old woman who decided to give up driving on her 90th birthday, the article explores this one particular challenge of getting older. In sending it to my parents (who are in their mid-sixties), I was mostly joking. Still, though, there's a little bit of interest—though not at all concern yet—behind my sharing that article with them.

All things come to an end. Everything. Although that's a tough lesson to learn, the good news is that it's going to happen no matter what, so, whether we're willing to learn it or not, it's out of our control.

Sunday's gospel lesson ([Mark 13:1-8](#)) contains two distinct but related teachings. First, Jesus reminds us of what we already know: everything will come to an end. One of his disciples points out the "large stones" and "large buildings" there on the Jerusalem temple mount, and Jesus responds rather forebodingly, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

Thanks a lot, Jesus. Thanks for the unpleasant reality check. That's like walking into an art museum, staring at a masterpiece, and having someone come up behind you and say, "You know, over time the paint oxidizes, leaving a less vibrant painting. Eventually, there will be nothing there." We don't like that reminder. We like pretending that this moment will last forever. Somewhere deep down, we know that it won't. And Jesus wants to awaken that reality within us.

Why? Because it's tempting to get lost in our own limited perspective and lose sight of God's time. "All flesh is grass," the prophet says. We are fleeting. Only God abides. (Sorry, Lebowsky). And the kingdom of God demands singular focus. It requires us to keep God's perspective. Our time is short. The kingdom is coming. There's an urgency about it. Even the seemingly permanent structures of society will

crumble away in the blink of an eye. What are we going to do about it?

But the second teaching in Sunday's Gospel reading holds that perspective in check. "When will it be?" the disciples ask. "When will it all be accomplished?" Jesus responds with a clear warning: "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name ... and they will lead many astray ... this must take place, but the end is still to come." There is remarkable emphasis on that last phrase: "the end is still to come." The earthquakes and tempests and wars and rumors of wars that seem to shake our existence to its very foundation are coming, but the end is *still* to come. There's a danger in mistaking the urgency of the coming kingdom for something that you can predict.

Jesus is telling us to get ready but don't rush. He's asking us to hurry up and wait. He's predicting the imminent destruction of the world and telling us it's still somewhere ahead of us. He's asking us to look for signs and be ready to act upon them but also not to mistake those signs for the end itself. And that leaves us in a tough place.

It's hard to live with urgency, and it's hard not to let urgency define us. What does it mean to be in-between? What does it mean to keep that kind of perspective—the God's-coming-but-not-yet perspective? There's a graciousness to accepting it and building one's life around it but not letting it dominate us. To me, that seems like a message of hope.

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