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Scripture Readings:

1 Samuel 2:1-10,
Hebrews 10:11-14,
Mark 13:1-8

It seems that the writer of the gospel of Mark is writing to an audience that have known many new voices that claim messianic status. Josephus records some of these figures, and Mark seems to have anxiety about them too, recording these words of Jesus almost as a warning for the future followers of Jesus in the early years of the Christian way.

The writer of Mark's gospel seems to feel compelled to state definitely the Messianic nature of Jesus in light of Pretenders. The phrase "in my name" is used only five other times apart from here in this gospel (9:37, 38, 39, 41; 13:13) and seems, for Mark, the true name to honor Jesus, rather than 'Jesus', 'Lord' or 'Son of Man' So here we see Jesus at ease with the narratives that will eventually befall Jerusalem (perhaps events that were occurring during the time of the composition of this gospel text). This is, for Mark, an indication of Jesus' identity as the true Messiah. There is so much conflict at the heart of this text. The conflict between Mark — who considers Jesus to be the true Messiah — and those pretenders, and their followers.

And then there is clearly conflict in Mark about the future: on the one hand, Mark understands that Messianic pretenders will deceive their followers about the future. The future is unknown, part of this text seems to say. And yet, Mark has Jesus understand the future. The future is only known by the one who says we cannot know the future.

The signs that Mark's Jesus speaks about are calamitous indeed, and much **apocalyptic** — even **dystopian** — theologies have flowed from reading the signs of the times. For a while, the EEC was

the beast with many heads, and then it wasn't. For another while a particular country was the image of Babylon, and then it wasn't. It seems that some of the primal anxieties of humanity are caught between the knowledge that we cannot know, and the primal desire to have some kind of jurisdiction over the future.

And so which is it? Can we tell the future by following the real Messiah or are we destined for a future that is unfolding and uncertain?

At this point it is helpful to realize that this Sunday's excerpt from the gospels is not meant to be finally sufficient in itself. It is part of the unfolding drama of the Christian calendar. It is raising up expectation about power and glory, about storms and mountains and loudness. Bang! And then it brings us to a point of shock: a small human, born of an unexpected mother. Birthpangs indeed. The reference of Jesus to birth in that line "there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the "birthpangs" can almost be lost amidst the cataclysmic nature of the other events. But here it is, a pang, a birth, a life created by another life, the human community continuing, supporting, reciprocal, vulnerable, in need of nurture and growth.

We sometimes expect Prophetic and Apocalyptic texts to tell the future, like some kind of sacred soothsaying. This desire for certainty draws on certain primal instincts in us. But the drama of the Christian year calls us — over and over, again and again — to the realization that we cannot know the future, but we might be able to discern the present. The true apocalypse is that among us — over and over, again and again — possibility is revealed in vulnerability. We're indeed, that clay pot that get's cracked for light to shine through.

The Key to a Joy-Filled Life

Joy goes beyond happiness. Joy is the happiness that does not depend on what happens. It springs from gratefulness. When

we begin to take things for granted, we get sucked into boredom. Boredom is deadly. Yet, everything within us longs for "life, life in fullness" (John 10:10). The key to life in fullness is gratefulness.

— from [The Way of Silence: Engaging the Sacred in Daily Life](#)

"I feel, therefore I am."

Feminist playwright Eve Ensler often chanted these words to herself when she was going through treatment for cancer. She shares the spirit behind the sentiment in a [Becoming Wise episode](#):

"I'm in my body, therefore I can feel my existence. I feel the breath. I feel the living, breathing fiber that is humanness. This notion of objectivity — as if that were ever possible, as if the brain could somehow separate you from your subjective self — has created a level of dissociation on the planet. You can get yourself into a mindset which keeps you from opening your heart."

The relationship between mind and body has perplexed philosophers and theologians for centuries, and while we will (likely!) not be able to come to any resolutions on the matter in this newsletter, I do appreciate how people like Ensler and neurosurgeon James Doty move away from thinking of the mind as divorced from the body and instead toward exploring their deep interdependence. As Doty explains in [this week's On Being](#), seeking connection is a mental act that has profound physiological benefits:

“I give a talk about the difference between what I call ‘transformation,’ which oftentimes we get with just a mindfulness practice of attention and focus — but you cannot have ‘transcendence,’ which is this sense of meaning in your life, unless you take this journey outward. This is a journey of connection to others because when you connect with others, and you have an open heart, and you embrace the other as you, your physiology works at its best.”

Listening to these two interviews, I was reminded of how dismissive our culture and our economic system can be about the idea of the body as an end in itself, life-giving and meaningful in its very existence. Both conversations help reframe how we think not just about other people and their roles in our lives, but also how we ourselves show up in this wide and tangled world. What we call this open-heartedness, I’ll leave for another day — though I am holding close [Jean Vanier’s thoughts](#) on human touch:

“It’s the realization of how to create a culture which is no longer a culture just of competition, but a culture of welcoming, where tenderness, where touch is important, and it’s neither sexualized nor aggressive. It has become human.”

Consider this your friendly reminder to connect with yourself and those around you! On Being is that radio show so many of the NONES & DONES listen to on a weekly basis. I too appreciate it and catch it on line

when I can’t tune in at 7 a.m. Sunday.



Last Sunday I participated in my first Auction, ever. It was fun watching the bidding and seeing what items secured the interest of so many and what items I am sure were purchased to be put on E-Bay. I am convinced some were doing their Christmas Shopping and some getting their baked goods for the season. Logan, Shane, and Carissa (young folks who helped out) were getting in service hours. They were a blessing as they carried items about the gathered so items could be examined. Who would ever have thought an auction a perfect way to spend a Sunday afternoon!