

GROWING *Together*

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PLANNING FOR THE END OF THE WORLD

There is a joke that goes like this: A bishop was sitting in his office one day when suddenly the door burst open and his chaplain announced in a breathless voice, "There's someone coming down the hall and it looks a lot like Jesus: what should we do? The bishop replied, "Look busy."

The Hebrew and Christian scriptures speak in many places about an end to history – a time of judgement and reckoning, and a time of transformation, when God's sovereign justice and love will rule over all. When that time will come is unclear: Jesus asks us to read the 'signs of the times' and draw our own conclusions.

Today two groups of people are warning us that 'the end is nigh', and both are calling us to repent.

Some Christian groups, based on their reading of Scripture and world events, interpret the devastating wars of this century, the re-establishment of the state of Israel, the many earthquakes and natural disasters of our time as signs that Christ will return soon. This expectation of 'the end-times' has been growing in recent decades.

The others who warn of impending catastrophe are environmentalists. They base their conviction on scientific observation, on their interpretation of what they read in 'the book of nature'. They warn us that unless we change our ways drastically and soon, human life on this planet will become impossible.



Both groups call us urgently to repentance, to a change of direction. Ironically, they do not always understand each other's message. The misunderstanding is clear in the following story:

A man was walking in the park and he saw a boy throwing a pop can into the bushes. 'That's no way to treat the environment!' he said to the boy. The boy replied, "What do I care? Jesus is coming again soon."

The boy has jumped to a wrong conclusion. Whether Jesus is about to return or not, Christians have every reason to care about God's creation. We can look to Jesus' parable about the unjust steward for a clearer frame of reference.

In this story, a rich man goes on a journey, leaving his household in the care of his steward. Trusted by the master, he is charged to give everyone food at the proper times. But as soon as the master's back is turned, the steward begins to abuse and exploit those who should have been in his care. Jesus asks his hearers the question, what will the master do when he returns to his home and sees what his steward has been doing?

We are the stewards of God's creation. Like the rest of creation, we are part of God's household, though entrusted with a special duty of care. In many ways we have abused and are still abusing our trust. When 'the end times' come – whether for the whole world or even just for you personally – what do you want Jesus to find you doing about God's creation? Just 'looking busy?'

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