

You may have heard that there were some folks who thought you wouldn't be today. You have have heard that yesterday, May 21, was supposed to be the end of the world. A very small sect of Christian faith was trying to tell the world that yesterday at 6pm, local time, the rapture would happen.

And you're all here! Which means either, one, the rapture didn't happen, or, two, as a church we have a lot to worry about.

I think it's the first.

Now the idea of the rapture is pretty new in Christianity. It has really only come about in the past few centuries, and it has never really been accepted by anything more than a vocal but very small minority of believers. They believe that there will come a day where believers are suddenly taken up into heaven while non-believers are left behind here on earth. They base their idea on one short, disputed verse in one of Paul's letters. And they really, really believe it.

The group that was responsible for the idea that the world was going to end yesterday is based out of California. Their leader did some complicated but questionable mathematical computations and somehow decided that yesterday was the day. There could be no doubt. And so his followers spread the word on billboards, and the internet, and one on one on the streets.

They were positive he was right. So positive that I read an article about one family that had planned to spend down all of their savings so that yesterday they would be left with nothing. Another woman quit her job and went with her husband to tell people on the streets, even while her teenage kids didn't believe a word of it.

I had a few people ask me this week, "Does your church really believe in this May 21st, end of the world thing?" And I responded that despite all the press this very small sect was being given, 99.99% of Christians did not believe the world was going to end yesterday.

But did you notice how much attention that .01% got? Did you notice how interested some people were by it?

It's been a problem since Paul wrote his letters to the earliest churches. The early believers thought that Christ would come back in their lifetimes. Paul struggled to assure them that the fact Christ hadn't come right back didn't mean that they weren't loved or saved or remembered.

Since then there have been thousands of different ideas about the end of the world. Hundreds of doomsdays. Hundreds of times that people have said that we are on the verge of an apocalypse. Hundreds of May 21st. And on those days, each time, true

believers who stood and waited at the appointed hour only to find that nothing happened to them.

I thought about that family with the teenage kids yesterday. I read an article about them in the New York times. They had been spreading this message about the end of the world to everyone, but meanwhile, their kids had felt neglected. They talked about needing to take the SATs, worrying about how to pay for college now that their parents had spent down their college funds, and even just going to the high school parties that were taking place yesterday night.

One son talked about how it was hard for him to make plans for his future because he felt like his parents didn't care about his future. They didn't believe he had one.

It was easy to make jokes about the end of the world yesterday. There were plenty of them. I confess I may have made a few.

But really, at 6pm yesterday, I am aware that for a very small group of people, their worlds did come to an end. All that they truly believed was revealed to be false. All their work and sacrifice and misdirected energy became clear. All their worst fears were revealed. And they were lost.

We may be tempted to say that they got what they deserved. But really, they're not so different from us. They're just an extreme example of our worst tendencies to neglect the lives that God has already given us.

In today's Gospel passage Jesus talks a little about what comes after this life. He tells us that he is going before us and preparing a home for us in God's house. He tells us that he will one day bring us there himself.

And even then, with him right there, the disciples wanted details. Thomas asked, "Where are you going and how can we know the way?" Philip said, "Show us God and then we will be satisfied."

They had him in front of them, reassuring them, telling them it would be okay, and even then they couldn't focus on what was in front of them. Even then, they were more worried about the next life than this one.

And every generation of Christians after them has done the same things. We have wanted to know the details of what happens next. We have wanted to know the exact date and place and time. We have wanted to prepare ourselves for the end of the world. And sometimes it has looked as extreme as the group that waited at 6pm yesterday, and other times it has looked a lot like everyday life.

It's normal to wonder. It's normal to want to have some assurance that God is bigger than our world. It's normal to want to know that God's love will save us all in the end.

But when we become so obsessed with the details that we forget to live the life that God has given us here, the life that God has made good, we miss so much.

I've talked before about growing up in the South, and how that has forever affected my view of religion. Growing up I always heard the question, "Are you saved?" I was told over and over that if I was not, I would burn for all of eternity in a fiery hell. The summer I was 15, I thought about that a lot. So much so, that I got pretty depressed about it. I'd lie on the living room couch and watch the ceiling fan and think about it. Life, the way the Christians I knew presented it, seemed life was this awful test that no one could pass. I certainly wasn't good enough to earn my way into heaven, and if I was going to everything else felt pointless.

I went back to school that fall and slowly the questions went away. But they were always there. It wasn't until I got to seminary that I started to truly believe that this life was not meant to be a test, and that God wanted us not to live in fear, but to live in gratitude.

I learned in seminary what I should have learned from the Christians I had known my whole life. That in the end, we are sorted into the good and the bad. We are not saved or discarded. Instead, we are all loved by a God who sees our imperfections and gives us grace anyways. In fact, gives us grace because of it.

The measure of our life here on earth, no matter what God has in store for us next, no matter when Christ will return and change everything, is how we respond to the grace that we have already received. Do we live in fear, whether waiting for May 21st or lying on the couch thinking that we will never be good enough? Or do we meet that grace with gratitude? Do we turn our lives over to God and say "no matter what happens, I know I will be okay because your grace is so overpowering...so, please God, use me"?

We are at our best as Christians not when we are spreading fear. Not when we are worried about what comes next. Not when we are doing good works because we are afraid we might not be good enough for God's love. We do our best work when we know that God's grace has already taken hold of us, and will never let us go. We do our best work when we are simply trying to say thank you for a gift so great that we can never really understand it.

It's May 22nd. And the world has not ended. And neither has God's grace, nor our gratitude. I don't know the details about the end of the world, or the next life, or anything like that. But I do know this: God will be there. And if God is there, it will be good. Amen.