

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska.

Message from Rev. Israel Portilla-Gómez, Associate Rector. May 17, 2026

Scripture readings: Acts 1:6-14, Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36, 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11, John 17:1-11

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

For this year's Lent, a retired couple decided to suspend all access to news as a form of fasting and told their friends and family that. It was hard, but they did it. After Easter day, the husband turned on the TV. The first images showed bombs and missiles in the air, and a new war with Iran. So he called out to his wife and said, "Honey, watch this—is it the end of the world?" She replied: "Nope, just Monday."



Gustave Doré, 1868, oil in canvas. Art Gallery of Hamilton.

It seems that we humans have an intense fascination with knowing when the end of the world will come. In the first reading, the disciples ask Jesus, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" By asking this, they wanted to know when the kingdom of God would finally be established, a time when there would be a final judgment. Jesus had already heard this question, but the difference now is that He has already risen. So they might have thought that He could solve that great mystery. However, Jesus' answer goes in the same direction: "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority."

What Jesus promised is that the Holy Spirit will accompany us so that we may be his witnesses of love in every corner of the world. Those were some of his last words on the Ascension Day that took place forty days after Easter. The book of Acts tells us: "he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight." The people who were there seem to have stood gazing up at the sky, waiting to see him again, but two men in white robes told them: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

So, in our faith, we believe that Jesus will return, and that is when everything will come to

an end. At the same time, we should not worry about it. However, telling a human being not to worry is like telling them to do just that.

Then, Christian theology created a branch dedicated to the study of the end times. It is called eschatology and comes from two Greek terms: ἔσχατος (*eschatos*): 'last'; and λόγος (*logos*): 'the word', meaning the "doctrine of the last things". There is also a specific term for The Second Coming, παρουσία (*parousia*), and it appears 24 times in the New Testament. The Holy Scriptures themselves suggest that the Parousia, the Second Coming of Jesus, is imminent and that we are in the *eschatos*, the end of the times. We can see through history how certain pastors, especially in the evangelical world, have even announced the precise day of it. Unsuccessfully, the many predictions have failed.

Even though we find in the Holy Scriptures that the Parousia is imminent, the focus remains on being ready. This means bringing the good news of life that Jesus offers us. The end times are merely a part of the divine mystery, and we have no business interfering with it;¹ they should not cause us anxiety. In all likelihood—given the current trajectory of humanity—it is far more probable that we ourselves will be the destroyers of our own world, thereby hastening the end times.

I wish to focus on the phrase: "You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth." Who does this pronoun "you" refer to? Without a doubt, it refers to us; our Lord Jesus entrusts His redemptive and loving work to our hands. Where are "the ends of the earth"? Many people in the Lower 48 already consider Alaska to be "the end of the earth", "the Last Frontier." Yet, "the ends of the earth" is simply any place where love is needed. People often assume that faith is primarily about religion, but that is actually a secondary aspect. The primary sign of believing in Jesus is not how much we know *about* God, but rather the love we demonstrate toward others, toward ourselves, toward creation, and toward God.

I would like to finish with a poem, Christ Has No Body, of Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.



Painted by Fray Juan de la Miseria c. 1576

¹ Ma, Julie. "Eschatology and Mission: Living the 'Last Days' Today." *Transformation* 26, no. 3 (2009): 186–98.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43052774>.