

## World Unmade

Some sermons back I referred to the 1965 song by The Seekers: “A World of our Own.” The refrain goes “And I know you will find there'll be peace of mind/ When we live in a world of our own”. Well don't seek that. Seek what found Jane when she at last sees the Christ-character in C. S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*. “Jane looked [at him]; and instantly her world was unmade. ...[H]er world was unmade; she knew that. Anything might happen now” (142, 143).

The Devil, the World, and your Flesh always want to unmake God's world. It started in Eden, a perfect world. Even there the Devil could bring discontent with God and doubt of His ways, wisdom, and love. If the Devil can unmake the perfect world of a perfect person, he won't have any trouble unmaking the world of a fallen Christian. The World itself would unmake your Christian world too by claiming this is all there is. There's nothing more than the 70, 80, 90 years here and after that it's what pagan radio host, Neil Boortz, called “the dirt nap”; what Winston Churchill called, “The big sleep”. There's no reward or punishment after this, the world preaches. The quintessence of hell, says 17<sup>th</sup> century John Bunyan, is to forget there is a hereafter (*Pilgrim's Progress*, 155). And as for your Flesh, it loathes the world it has and lusts for the one it doesn't.

These 3, Devil, World, and Flesh are in cahoots to unmake the Christian's world. You see this in 1 Jn. 2:16, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” Who does Scripture call the prince, ruler, god of this world? The Devil. 2 Cor. 4:4 refers to him as, “the god of this age. In Jn. 14:30 Jesus calls him, “the prince of this world.” Eph. 2:2 calls him, “the ruler of the kingdom of the air.” The unholy 3 are ever at work to bring you to misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice by unmaking the world you think you must have. If I had more money, more love, more success, a better home, job, life, well then my world would be perfect. And we fret and struggle and worry and fear to make this happen, and for minute we have what The Seekers found: peace of mind living in a world of our own. Till one or more of the evil 3 unmake it.

Let's go back to high school. Your world was smaller then, but still you knew what you had to have for it to be just right. For some of you it was grades; your life crumbled if you got a B. For some of you it was success in sports. For most of you it was friends and your relationship or lack thereof with the opposite sex. Looking back you can probably remember some of the poignancy of those 4 short years, but you probably also smile at how your whole world was so firmly tied to what mattered less and less as the decades went by. My point is that you, us, I am still doing that now. We tie our sense of self, satisfaction, even salvation to the thinnest of threads. That's like tying your prized glass ornament to a thin thread. One bump, tug, or breeze and down it goes to shatter. Remember how easily your teen world could shatter? Your self-made adult world is that easy for the big 3 to bring down.

But Jesus too wills to unmake your self-made world so that anything He wills may happen. In the Lewis story all it took was as the 1964 Hollies song says, “Just one look.” You know some kids are like that. You can recall them to obedience, from their self-made world back to yours with just a look. Most you can't. It takes more than a look. Read the story of Jacob (Gen. 28-35), a man who lived by conniving, plotting and planning. The one who said to the Lord that He would be His God if He did this, that, and this too to make the world as Jacob wanted it. Read how the Lord blessed, protected, and kept Jacob even though he continually plotted and planned and did things his way. Read how with his brother bearing down on him and his helpless family with 400 armed men, Jacob resorts to planning and plotting, but that gives him no peace. Prayer is wrestled out of him and the Lord actually lets him overcome Him, but then the Lord unmakes his world by just a touch. Jacob limps away from that encounter but years go by before Jacob, the self-reliant conniver, becomes Israel, one who overcomes by faith rather than wits.

Our Lord is ever at work unmaking our self-made world that is so stable, delightful, and far from Him. He desperately tries to unmake your world each Sunday through preaching the Law. Each week, He would bring you to the point of confessing to being a wretched sinner who deserves not only punishment in the world without end but in this world. But when those words become as Isaiah 28:10 says they do to hard hearts: “Do and do, rule on rule, line on line”, His love moves Him to unmake our world that is rolling down hill like a snowball headed for hell. He does this by shaking it somehow. Read about the 1964 Alaska earthquake, the most powerful in U.S. history. The earth shook but for 4 ½ minutes and unmade whole buildings, villages, and mountains. The Lord has unmade my world many times through big things like Death, Sin, and the Devil, and through small things like toothaches, car troubles, surgeries, and moving.

I've said many times that I'm amazed how long it takes for me, a pastor, to realize I should “take it to the Lord in prayer.” Well, I'm equally amazed at how long it takes for me to realize that a self-made world I believed had to stand, must stand, and must be protected at all costs, needed to come down, needed to fall, needed to be unmade. For that's the only way I would come off the island that 17<sup>th</sup> century poet John Donne said no man could be but I, along with Simon and Garfunkel, asserted I was.

Through the preaching of the Law by word, by deed, by life, by loss, my world was unmade. That, by the way is what is going on in Lewis book, Jane has made her world in a feminist, denial of the Order of Creation, sort of way. She is mad, bitter, and unfulfilled, but to her the problem is not the world she has made. No, she's still singing with The Seekers that this world of her own is where she can leave all her sorrows far behind. But God won't leave her at peace there, but drives her to the Christ character who unmakes her world.

Now the unmaking of our world is not the answer. The answer is implied by Jane's thought that having her world unmade meant anything could happen now. And this brings us to Nathaniel. His world was unmade, but not quickly. When Philip told him that the Promised Messiah was found, he starts humming The Who song, "We won't get fooled again." Go ahead give that 1971 song listen. See if it doesn't seem relevant 50 years latter: "We'll be fighting in the streets/ With our children at our feet/ And the morals that they worship will be gone/ And the men who spurred us on/ Sit in judgment of all wrong", but this leads to singing, "Then I'll get on my knees and pray/ We don't get fooled again". That's what I'm afraid of. The Devil, the World, and my Flesh continuously preach: Whatever your problem Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus "son of Joseph" ain't the answer. Money, sex, booze, and even self-pity may be. Medicine, science, psychology, and politics certainly proclaim they are the answer to my world having been unmade by pandemic and political upheaval.

So, I have my doubts, and I can bring them to Jesus. Nathaniel certainly does. He says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" and Jesus, because He's God in our flesh, hears Him and responds: "Here is an Israelite in whom there is no guile." That word 'guile' is used of Jacob before he became God's Israel. One commentator translates Jesus' words as "An Israelite in whom there is no Jacob" (*Morris*, 166). And look how Jesus answers Nathaniel's honest doubts that Jesus could be the answer to his unmade world and whether or not Jesus can really know him. Jesus tells Nathaniel that when he was in the traditional place of prayer in a home, "under the fig tree", He saw him there. See Nate's head explode. See Nate's world unmade in that instant.

You feel isolated, alone, and this is not a good island. Your island is overrun with fears, doubts, worries, and more. Once you get spooked by something everything sets you off. It's like once a tooth gets inflamed every little thing makes it flare with pain. Well, you're not alone; you're not isolated. Jesus, Very God of Very God, was made like you in all ways except sin. He was tempted in everyway you are right now. And while you and I fall prey to the unholy 3, Jesus never did.

Moreover, He's the One who bore the punishment your sins call for. He paid the price for the world of your own that you built, Tower of Babel-like, in offense to God. He knows not just every prayer you've ever said but every thought you've ever had. And He can do what you can't. He can separate your words of prayer, praise, and thanks from the doubts intertwined with them. But Jesus is not none remaking Nate's world or yours. It's not enough to know that the Father of all mercies, the God of all comfort, knows all about you, where you've been, where you are, and where you're going. It's not enough to know as the Lord promises in Jer. 29:11. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

This is not enough. Jesus does more. He solemnly promises as only God Almighty can: Verily, verily, you're going to see what heretofore only Jacob did: The angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Your Jesus whom you know in Word, in Deed, in Absolution, in Eating and Drinking is the connecting point between heaven and earth. By Jesus your prayers about your unmade world go straight to God and by Jesus God comes to your world to actively remake it. Anything might happen now: anything that is which serves God's glory and your everlasting salvation. Amen

Rev. Paul R. Harris  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas  
The Second Sunday after Epiphany (20210117); John 1:43-51