

When I was in middle school, the band *R.E.M.* (yes, like rapid-eye-movement), released “It’s the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)”. To my sixth-grade mind, the lyrics didn’t make any sense, but the music really rocked! Truly, the lyrics are, at best, a rambling of what might seem like disjointed phrases and words. To look them up and read them, it paints a picture of many problems that had plagued the world as it approached the new millennium; and perhaps with little surprise we still face. Each rambling stanza was capped with the refrain: “It’s the end of the world as we know it; It’s the end of the world of we know it; It’s the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine.” As with a lot of music, interpretation is everything (well, everything but the original composer’s intent). It could be argued that the song is about being entertained by the destruction of social stability. It could be argued that it highlights the apathy that many people have, and a blind eye that is all too often turned in light of the problems we face in the world.

Fans of the band, would immediately side with the later interpretation. Michael Stipe, the lead singer of *R.E.M.*, left nothing to the imagination. In a 1992 article with *Q Magazine*, he stated “The words come from everywhere. I’m extremely aware of everything around me, ... So that ended up in the song along with a lot of stuff I’d seen when I was flipping TV channels. It’s a collection of streams of consciousness.”<sup>1</sup>

I’m sure that all of you reading this are well aware of the hoarding that was (and to some extent is still) occurring. No one will soon forget the ‘Great Toilet Paper Shortage of 2020’. All jokes aside, this is part of what got me thinking about *R.E.M.* and started on this article.

More than once I have heard, and said myself, “Everything has changed” or “Everything is different”. As I think about it, *everything has always been different*. It seems as if every decade of my life has been plagued by some *scare*. One of my earliest memories of ‘pandemic proportions’ was the beginnings of the public awareness of HIV/AIDS. For real, they told us as young elementary aged children, not to touch each other, share food or drinks (as little kids do), and other prohibitions that now seem ridiculous. More recently, there has been a whole host of maladies: Avian Flu, Swine Flu, SARS, MERS, Ebola, and threats of a vaccine-resistant strain of Smallpox.

I am not saying that we should shrug off the impact that the aforementioned calamities cause, nor especially the current pandemic of COVID-19. What I am saying is, the changes we are experiencing in our daily life is simply that, *changes*. We have been experiencing changes repeatedly. Eventually the changes are just reality. I remember as young child watching O.J. Simpson running through airports on *Hertz Rent a Car* commercials. After the events of September 11th, 2001, running from one flight to the next wouldn’t do any good, as you still have to go through security (not to mention, if someone took off running in an airport, that would cause serious panic!). For myself and others, security screening is a change; yet there is a whole generation for whom this is just reality — they have no knowledge of O.J. sprinting and hurdling through airports.

Change is constant. It really boils down to how we decide to face changes; every single day. How do we choose to see the world around us? How do we understand hope? What is truly at

the source of any fear we are experiencing?

Which leads to the biggest change... *EVER*. In response to the absolute fallen, depraved condition of creation, God brought a change into this world that was only dreamed for. In the Incarnation, Blessed Life, Passion, Death and Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ, creation experienced a change that set events in motion that we still experience today! Even more so, it truly is *the end of the world* as anyone knew it, or would ever experience it again.

Easter is our celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior. We celebrate God raising him up from the dead, and so extending this new life to us. It should also be a time to celebrate that same new life that we experience in Christ. It is this new life that reorients our way of seeing the world, experiencing that world, living in hope, and finding courage to truly fear nothing, not even death. The Resurrection changed everything!

As I write this, the churches of the Holston Conference (and all over Morristown) are still closed, in an attempt to help to *flatten the curve of infections*. I never had dreamed that in my life I would “close” a church. I know that you join with me in a sense of mourning; a deep sadness of being physically separated. It is something that no one ever expected. However, we look to this time through a hopeful and faith-filled outlook of a new creation in Christ. We know that *we are the church*, together or separated, we are still the Body of Christ in the world; we always have been and we always will be. We face every new day, just as that; *a new day*. A new day in grateful and faithful lives before God and extend the grace we have received into a world that is in need of it. “Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, because he lives all fear is gone.”

I know that the certainty of us gathering together to worship at Easter, at the church, is bleak. Despite it, we join together, in spirit (and thanks to nifty technologies), “one with each other, one in Christ.” Do not neglect to pray for one another, and for our world. Seek God’s mercy, his strength, and his grace in these troubling times, as well as all the days of your lives.

I miss all of you. Its strange being in our church building alone. We will gather together again, that I am sure of. Please practice precautions — washing hands, staying out of public places (as it is possible), covering your coughs and sneezes, and social distancing. Please reach out, if you are need of something, or if you are just tired of being cooped up; call your brothers and sisters in Christ, and check-in.

*Its the end of the world as we know it.....and I feel fine*

As a side note, today is the Annunciation of the Lord. This is the day marked in the liturgical calendar, as the day the angel announced to Mary that she would conceive and bear our Lord Jesus. Good News was spoken that day, and that Good News continues on! Listen each day for the blessed “announcements” of God’s grace in your life!

1. [www.songfacts.com/rem/its-the-of-the-world-as-we-know-it-and-i-feel-fine](http://www.songfacts.com/rem/its-the-of-the-world-as-we-know-it-and-i-feel-fine).