Sermon: **These things are like the first pains of childbirth** (Mark 13.8)

There are some church people I feel very sorry for – those who try to work out when the end-times will be.

Jesus says: “**no one knows when that day or hour will come, only the Father knows**” (Mark 13.32) Today we have warfare, earthquakes, famine (v8) – but that always been true.

However our world *is* troubled –

**Covid-19.** We may need to decide whether or not our premises are only available for those who are double-vaccinated (plus young children and those with exemptions). It will allow some things to happen again, like Morning Tea & Communion, but what do we do with those who refuse vaccines? Where is God’s love here?

**COP26** (the climate change conference). We have seen fires, floods, rising temperatures and seas; these will get worse, though most of us will be dead before that occurs. Does that mean we should not care?

What in our present way of life is coming to an end?

Methodist Conference is online next week – should that matter? In some ways not meeting in person will be harder for Methodism, which is a Connexional Church, and connecting is becoming harder, and more guilt-ridden. Should we stop expecting to travel to meetings, especially using planes?

What about holidays abroad – should we stop holiday flights for passengers? Our son Aidan got married over a year ago, and is waiting to hold a wedding reception until we can get there; will we ever? Should we?

What about our growing use of electricity? If generation becomes only by renewables, what happens when the winds and rainfall stop for a couple of weeks?

What about getting stuff from overseas? Should we only eat what NZ can grow, only buy what NZ can manufacture? And if that means extra cost, are we prepared to pay it?

The bottom line for the planet is that Earth will survive, even if humanity becomes extinct!

So there is a whole heap of implications, but ignoring them solves nothing. Jesus says three things to us:

[1] **Don’t be troubled** (Mark 13.7) – (as if startled and crying aloud); it is to be expected.

This is not a call for complacency, but a wake-up call. Bad stuff will happen, but we should not be surprised.

[2] TEXT – Childbirth is painful. I said I wanted six children – Sharon stopped at two! We have two contrasting but delightful children, and would not be without them.   
If there is childbirth, there is something new about to come; there will be pain, but joy afterwards!

[3] **Be on watch** (Mark 13.33) – be prepared, for the bad stuff *and* the new arrival.   
There is a current fire advert asking if you have a plan for evacuation? On 28 Oct 9.30 there was a Shake Out (earthquake drill) – did you take part?

At home we have water in bottles ready, a gas burner ready; are you prepared?

This is not about trying to work out dates, but living with a plan.