“It’s the End of the World As We Know It” - Stephanie Sorge, 8/31/25

 In 1947, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists introduced the “Doomsday Clock.” According to their website, “The Doomsday Clock is a design that warns the public about how close we are to destroying our world with dangerous technologies of our own making. It is a metaphor, a reminder of the perils we must address if we are to survive on the planet.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Midnight signifies the destruction of the world, and the closer we are, the more imminent it is.

 In 1947, the clock was set to 7 minutes before midnight, based on the threat of nuclear war. It has moved forward and back ever since. In 1984, it ticked down to three minutes before midnight because of the hostilities between the US and the USSR, but just seven years later, it was set to its earliest time ever - a full 17 minutes before midnight. If you want to know the closest the clock has ever been to midnight, you have to go all the way back to January of this year, when it reached 89 seconds before midnight. In their 2025 statement, the scientists said this: “Our fervent hope is that leaders will recognize the world’s existential predicament and take bold action to reduce the threats posed by nuclear weapons, climate change, and the potential misuse of biological science and a variety of emerging technologies. …Because the world is already perilously close to the precipice, a move of even a single second should be taken as an indication of extreme danger and an unmistakable warning that every second of delay in reversing course increases the probability of global disaster.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

 I wonder if the churches to whom John was writing felt as close to the end of the world as this. Death and destruction seemed certain. Hope beyond that? That was hard to imagine. The book is suffused with hope, but eschatological hope takes center stage in these final chapters. After the world as we know it ends, this is the new beginning - heaven on earth. God dwells, once and for all, with all of creation.

 Death will be no more, there will be no more crying, mourning, or pain. A river of life runs through that new creation, and on either side, trees of life. Their leaves are for the healing of the nations. Many people have looked to Revelation as a travel guide to heaven - pearly gates up ahead, mind your step on the streets of gold - but at best it’s an approximation. It’s like this, and kind of like that. In the end, what John can say, for sure, is that what is hard and bad and painful and difficult in this life will be gone, for good. There will be beauty, and singing, and God will dwell there.

 Maybe you’ve heard the saying, “Everything will be ok in the end. If it’s not ok, it’s not the end.” It’s been attributed to various people, including John Lennon and the Brazilian writer Fernando Sabino. I remember it from the 2011 movie, The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. At any rate, it’s an appropriate quote for these passages.

 I found a slightly different quote in a stunning variation on a Children’s Bible, called *The Book of Belonging*. It contains 42 stories that condense and consolidate the Biblical narrative around the theme of belonging. In the second story, “The Garden of Forgotten Names,” God tells the humans in the beautiful garden, “I belong with you, and you belong with me. Come, let me show you how to live.”[[3]](#footnote-3) That’s the beginning of the story - God’s creation is a place where we can belong and dwell together with God. In the final story, “A Forever Wedding Feast,” we read that “the Spirit reminded John that God’s dream is always coming true. So if the story doesn’t end in belonging, the story is not over.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

 I like that even more than the other quote. Who is to decide what is “ok in the end?” Is “ok” just ok, or is it better than ok? Belonging is different. It’s relational. No single person can adjudicate it. It’s a reciprocal practice. Belonging is about me and you, and those who are very different from me and you. How wildly inclusive must that new creation be for the full diversity of humanity to feel a sense of belonging there?

 I wondered what kind of reality must be created for it to be a place where even God belongs. And yet, God dwells and is present in the places and situations that are furthest from being worthy of hosting God. The band The Many wrote a song, “The Longest Nights,” an Advent anthem that expresses the wonder of God with us. They sing of the places where it doesn’t seem right for God to be:

* where the cattle sleep, in the mud and blood and hay,
* where shots ring out, where everything is burning, where there’s a hundred words for pain
* where the hurt is deep, where the wounded weep, where there’s so much we cannot say[[5]](#footnote-5)

 Does God belong in those places? They aren’t befitting God, but that’s exactly where God shows up. The belonging that is the end of the story isn't about transforming the world into a place that is good enough for God to dwell; it’s transforming the world into a place where all barriers to human belonging have been eradicated. That’s the new Jerusalem.

 Speaking of Jerusalem… Poet Naomi Shihab Nye wrote a poem by that name thirty years ago, lamenting the violence and pain in the city. She concludes, “There’s a place in my brain where hate won’t grow…”[[6]](#footnote-6) Thirty years later, poet Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer picks up the thread: “I want to believe there is in all of us - a place where hate won’t grow. I want to feed that place in myself. I want to listen to that place in you. I want us to live into another possible world, discover what else our lives can do.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

 I imagine feeding that place inside each of us with the fruit from the tree of life. I imagine gathering on the banks of the river of life, listening to each other’s stories. That is living into another possible world.

 It could be that the doomsday clock is right, and we’re on the brink of self-destruction. That’s consistent with many words of judgment throughout Scripture. We reap what has been sown, and we don’t have to look far to see how many varieties of hate, violence, and injustice have been sown. I don’t know how religious the Atomic Scientists are, but I read the clock saying this: it’s going to be a miracle if we somehow manage to avoid destroying ourselves and the world around us.

 I’m grateful to know that whatever happens, that won’t be the final word. I’m grateful for the assurance that whatever is beyond death is something like this vision - not necessarily the specifics, but to know that all will be well. But the gift of hope in Revelation is not just for some far off, unknown, inconceivable day. It’s the hope that, until we get there, we can start living into another possible reality here and now.

 If you were here in worship on Pentecost, you found a “Fruit of the Spirit” hidden under your chair. Do you remember your fruit? Mine was peace. If you didn’t receive one or you don’t remember, the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Choose your own adventure.

 As we conclude this season, this summer of surprise, what if we imagine those as the fruits from the tree of life? The leaves of those trees are for the healing of the nations. What if the nations, the world, our communities, schools, and families - were also nurtured with those fruits? That’s how we feed the places in ourselves where hate won’t grow.

 How many problems in the world today boil down to a question of belonging? What belongs in nature? What belongs in our history books? What gender identities and sexual orientations belong? Who belongs in our neighborhoods and cities? Who belongs in this country? Who belongs in Gaza? Ukraine? Sudan? Azerbaijan?

 In the beginning, God made humanity in God’s image, and told them, “I belong with you, and you belong with me. Come, let me show you how to live.”[[8]](#footnote-8) We may have lost our way, but in the end, we belong. All belong. May it be so.

1. https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/2025-statement/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mariko Clark and Rachel Eleanor, The Book of Belonging, p. 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, p. 277 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://shop.themanyarehere.com/products/the-longest-nights?srsltid=AfmBOoqXL4-h2ct1DJmMUuQjn4zWGtInJrIwAoRFkRXvROT\_AnU1sKAS [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54296/jerusalem-56d2347ab7a20 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://pollycastor.com/2025/08/19/what-comes-next-poem-by-rosemerry-wahtola-trommer/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Mariko Clark and Rachel Eleanor, The Book of Belonging, p. 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)