Last week, I went to check out the annual CANstruction exhibition down in lower Manhattan. For those of you who may not know, CANstruction is a competition of art displays using only canned foods of various colors, sizes, and shapes to form different patterns. All of the canned foods would eventually be donated to *City Harvest* – one of the largest food banks in the city. Each year a number of engineering and architectural companies would compete against each other exercising their ingenuity and creativity but more importantly they raise public awareness of a greater epidemic of hunger and under-nourishment in our society. It’s a win-win situation for all participants, visitors, and recipients.

Back in the days when I was working in Manhattan, my company would enter this competition every year. I wasn’t involved with the design or putting together of the display. I just helped out the team physically by moving boxes of canned food to the site. This was our winning entry that year. I believe it was called the **CANine**!

One of the most amazing things about this exhibition and these displays is that sometimes you have no idea of what you’re looking at until you take a step back from a distance, or see through the lens of a camera. Then all of a sudden, something magical happens. The larger image suddenly appears right before your eyes. Everything just makes sense. But if you stand too closely or focus on only few cans, you will NOT be able to see the overall pattern or image. This competition has been on for the past 26 years. It’s always the 1st couple of weeks in November.

Come to think of it, I think there’s also a deeper message of life here we can all learn…that **we often only see things from one perspective or a small fraction of it while failing to see the greater purpose and meaning as a whole.**

Perhaps what we need is to pause and “**take a step back and look around.**” Look for the larger meaning and purpose in life as a whole and not dwell on the momentary blurbs of setbacks or challenges as we may experience each day.

In the Gospel passage that we read earlier from Mark, Jesus was doing just that…inviting his disciples to **take a step back and see** from a larger perspective. This passage has been considered as a mini-apocalypse, sort of a sneak-preview of what the End Time may look like. It wasn’t meant to scare people off but to remind them God is ultimately in control and his master plan is still in place. Our mission in life each day is to participate and contribute our share of God’s orchestrated work, kind of like how each of those stack up with one another to form a larger pattern. **Each can serves a purpose in order to fulfill God’s greater mission here on earth.**

We’ve noticed that throughout much of Jesus’s ministry, he would drop these subtle hints to his followers about what the End may look like, that it’s a process and not just a momentary event. Yet people want to know, when is it going take place, or what exactly is going to happen to them? But it would be foolish and naïve of us to think that way while attempting to figure out what God’s overall plan is for us. Jesus isn’t going to come all of a sudden and everything will right itself out. No, that’s not how it’s going to work. But instead there will be series of events and signs that we can look out for leading up to the event. But at the end, Christ will triumph and prevail over the evils of the world.

As we read in our passage earlier, Jesus was with his disciples in the temple in Jerusalem. Then one of his disciples said to him, ***Rabbi, this place is so amazing! Take a look all around us, the temple is magnificent and huge!*** Jesus then replied back, ***You may be amazed by all that you see in front of you, but not one of these stones will be left standing here forever, everything will be destroyed.***

Despite all the signs that the prophets had mentioned before, somehow many, including these disciples **still didn’t get it**. They were clueless and having different expectation of what this new Kingdom of God may look like. **They still thought that a Savior would come and rescue them from all of their earthly misery and everything would be all right.** But that’s not how it’s supposed to work. The responsibility does not rest upon the Savior’s shoulder but upon the people as well. The people would still have to uphold their end of the covenant by breaking out of their stubborn hearts through confession and repentance. They would have to disrupt their pattern of sins and reclaim their relationship with God. **Even those who have accept the Savior’s salvific work in their hearts, they still need to pause what they’re doing, take a step back and examine their lives and repent of their sins and look…look for sign of hope and renewal, as well as God’s promise for their future.**

As it turned out, Jesus was right, the very same grandiose temple in Jerusalem that took 8 years to build, would be utterly destroyed by the Romans only 70 years later. Nothing in this world lasts forever. **What we see before our eyes and what we strive to achieve materially are trivial and irrelevant in light of God’s masterplan.**

The temple in Jerusalem was a metaphor of our own spiritual temples, a resting place of our souls. Jesus wanted us to focus on building this eternal temple of God which anchors upon our faith in Christ and not on any earthly successes or human achievements. Even our bodies may one day be faded, degenerated and worn away, but Christ assures us that the temple that God has prepared for us is eternal.

As one of the ancient proverbs reminds us that, *“****Life is a journey of meeting unexpected challenges.”***  What challenges is God placing before us today? How have we demonstrated faith and hope in light of the many trials and challenges that we face each day? In the midst of this frenzy season, let us not forget to take a step back and be amazed at what God is doing and what God has already installed for us in our future.

Friends, **we’re living in a “liminal” (or in-between) time.** **The Kingdom of God is here but not yet.** We live upon God’s promise of a brighter future. We are a pilgrim people wandering at sea or in the desert while keeping our eyes and hopes upon our future, as God leads us. Christ WILL return in accordance to God’s time and not ours. We shall remain vigilant to what is around us and pray for the spirit of discernment to respond accordingly.

As Jesus said, *“Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famine. This is but the beginning of the birth pains.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

In light of the many epic natural disasters that we have experienced more recently all around us such as super-hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, tornados, or other human tragedies such as religious persecutions and tribal warfare, domestic and overseas terrorist attacks, some have claimed that these were signs that the process towards the End has already begun. But to be honest, no one can be sure of God’s precise plan and timing, except God alone. Not even Jesus himself knew when the hour may come, we just need to be ready for it.

Perhaps it is a good thing that Jesus did not give us a precise timing as to when He would return….so this way we would not plan for it. Jesus only wanted us to **be prepared for it** and to **stay awake** when the time does come. Just as Jesus told us about the parable of the 10 brides, we need to make sure that we have enough oil on our lamps when the bridegroom does come. **The question isn’t so much about WHEN Christ will return, but rather WILL WE BE READY then?**

This sounds like an insurmountable task. But the good news is, **we do NOT have to do this all alone**. We’ve got each other to lend our supports and to hold each other accountable. As our text from Hebrews reminded us that we have the responsibility to look after our fellow sisters and brothers, to strengthen and to nurture one another by ***provoking one another to love and to carry out charitable deeds toward others. Engage in constant fellowship with one another and to encourage one another.[[2]](#footnote-2)***

In two weeks, we will be entering the season of Advent. Advent is a season for us to not only look back, but to look ahead, as we patiently wait in anticipation of Christ’s coming, who has come and will be coming again. It is not a time for us to jump too far ahead, because Christ is yet to come, as we pray that God grants us this discipline of patience and faith dwelled upon God’s promise. Advent is a time for us to examine our lives and be reconnected and be drawn near to Christ once again.

We live with a purpose fully dependent upon God, even when we live in the midst of insurmountable trials and challenges. God will grant us peace to calm all of our fears. **God will renew us and sustain us with signs of hope in times of hopelessness and despairs. As the Apostle Paul reassured us, *let us look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.[[3]](#footnote-3)***

Through this upcoming season of Thanksgiving and Advent, **let us lay aside all the earthly temptations and what the world yearns for us to pursue and believe. Let us offer our thanksgiving for what God has already provided for us, as we focus our hearts, our souls, and our minds upon the light of Christ, which overcomes the darkness of this world.** Thanks be to God.In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Mark 3:5-8* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Hebrews 10:24-25* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *2 Corinthians 4:18* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)