and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory" (13:25-26). Keep your eyes open, says the Bible. "When you see these things taking place, you know that [Jesus] is near" (v. 29).

Theologians and preachers throughout history seized on the apocalyptic elements of Scripture from the books of Daniel and Revelation, and in some of the words of Jesus in an almost faddish fashion. The Anabaptists of the 1530s in Münster, Germany. The Millerites of the early 1840s who took to the mountains by the thousands to await the return of Christ. The frenzy in the early 1970s that attended the publication of The Late Great Planet Earth. The Branch Davidians of 1993. The Left Behind books and movies. Y2K. This list only scratches the surface of apocalyptic fever that’s raged through the human community over the millennia.

More recently, the "end times" and the return of Jesus caught the attention of the world when radio preacher Harold Camping studied the Bible and concluded that the world would end on May 21, 2011. After sharing this prediction with his listeners, Camping used millions of dollars of their donations to put his message on 5,000 billboards nationwide. Camping estimated that 7 billion people would die.

May 21st came and went and Jesus did not return. Camping's followers expressed astonishment and disappointment. Some denounced him as a false prophet. Camping amended the date to October 21st, but still the world didn't end. It didn't really matter: the fad, the fever, had subsided. Maybe, Camping should have read Mark 13:32: "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Clearly, fads come and go, whether they involve fidget spinners or biblical prophecies. But the truth is, nothing really endures. Jesus himself said that absolutely everything will pass away, including "heaven and earth" (v. 31).

The question for us is this: What, then, will not fade and disappear? Fortunately, Jesus tells us. Everything will come and go, he says, except…wait for it…the word of God! Jesus says, "My words will not pass away" (v. 31). The word of the Lord is our solid foundation in an ever-changing world, so every day we need to "keep awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come" (v. 35).

The challenge for us is to move from a fleeting fad to a firm foundation. As we begin the season of Advent, we need to build our lives on something more solid than a pet rock or a fidget spinner or a hula hoop. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers words that are foundational for the Christian life. Unfortunately, the gospel of Mark does not include this important set of teachings. Mark tells us that Jesus "went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message" (1:39), but then he skips over three chapters of teachings that appear in the gospel of Matthew.

So, Mark is not a big help when it comes to the words of Jesus. Better to turn to Matthew’s Gospel, in which Jesus says, "Do not resist an evildoer...give your cloak...go also the second mile...give to everyone who begs from you...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (5:39-44).

Such words are tough to hear and even more difficult to follow. Jesus begins by saying, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'" (v. 38), and this makes perfect sense to us. After all, we live with a justice system which generally follows the conventional wisdom that the punishment should fit the crime. It only seems fair to take "an eye for an eye."

But the immutable and eternal words of Jesus point to a different reality: God "makes [the] sun rise on the evil and on the good" (v. 45). In this divine reality, everyone, evil and good, righteous and unrighteous, is a child of God. God loves all of God’s children and provides for them.

Our job, as Christians, is not to follow fads that tend to lift some people up and bring others down. Instead, we are to try to love other people as God loves them, seeing the image of God in people who may look very ungodly to us. Drifting into sarcasm, Jesus asks, "If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (v. 46). In other words, if you only love your friends and family members, what have you accomplished? Anyone can do that, even the corrupt tax collectors of the Roman Empire.

"Do not resist an evildoer," says Jesus (v. 39). Jesus is not being soft on crime here, but he is teaching that resistance can lead to an escalation of violence. Nelson Mandela took this approach in South Africa when he said, "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner."

"Give your cloak," says Jesus. "Go also the second mile" (vv. 40-41). Show your neighbors that you love them so much that you will literally give them the coat off your back. Demonstrate that you are seeing God so clearly in them that you will walk a great distance with them. Such generosity is not faddish; it's foundational.

"Give to everyone who begs from you," says Jesus. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (vv. 42, 44). In each of these commands, we are being challenged to see other people in a new light: in the light of Jesus' words. As we walk in this way, we begin to see our neighbors as children of God, and as people who carry inside them the image of God.

As we begin the Advent season, with all its anticipation, it’s good to be reminded of what were waiting to see. The birth of Jesus, yes, but also the birth of God’s preferred and promised future: a future where all people are respected, loved, and treated fairly. A future where there is no pain or sorrow or death. A future where there is light and life forevermore. God’s preferred and promised future is a far cry from where the world is now, but we can get there if we rely on the foundational words of Jesus: love God and love your neighbor.

This kind of foundational living is not easy, which is why it is so critical that we cling Jesus’ words which last forever instead of the fleeting fads the world proffers. What Jesus says is never faddish: it is foundational for Christian living. Fads, by definition, will fade. Indeed, everything is doomed to disappear. Everything except the words of Jesus. Christian kindness never goes out of style.

Prayer: God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy so that we may share his wisdom when he comes in glory. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

**Sources:**

* Best, Joel. "What's behind the fidget spinner fad?" The Conversation, May 10, 2017. theconversation.com.
* "Fads of the 2000s." Crazyfads.com. Retrieved May 23, 2017.
* Mandela, Nelson. "Mandela in his own words." CNN, June 26, 2008. cnn.com.
* McFadden, Robert D. "Harold Camping, dogged forecaster of the end of the world, dies at 92." The New York Times, Dec. 17, 2013. nytimes.com.
* "What is the most significant fad of all time?" The Atlantic. April 2017. theatlantic.com.

**From Fad to Foundation**

Sunday, December 3, 2017 Mark 13:24-37

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Fidget spinners are one of the hottest toys of 2017. A fidget spinner is a little device that has paddle-shaped blades attached to a central core. When you squeeze the core and give the blades a flick, they begin to spin. Because fidget spinners are colorful and inexpensive, just a few dollars apiece, many children have a collection of them.

As cool as these toys are, they’ve still managed to generate controversy; some schools ban fidget spinners as a distraction. But, don’t worry! My guess is that over time, the fad will fade, and fidget spinners will gather dust along with Rubik’s cubes, hula hoops, troll dolls, Beanie Babies, and jelly bracelets.

Not that fads are limited to children, mind you. Adults are equally susceptible to fads. Don’t believe me? I have two words for you: pet rocks. Over a six-month period in the mid-1970s, Americans bought 1.5 *million* pet rocks. These smooth stones, sold in cardboard boxes with a nest of straw and breathing holes, created a shopping frenzy, flying off the shelves as fast as they hit the shelves. And they were rocks! Otherwise sane, normal people - teachers, lawyers, stock brokers - went to work, and there on their desk sat a pet rock. Go figure!

Within the last 20 years, many fads have come and, thankfully, most have gone: Razor Scooters, Live-strong wristbands, WWJD bracelets, Heelys, flash mobs, "Vote for Pedro" T-shirts, speed dating, cupcake stores, "Angry Birds," "Words with Friends," Cronuts (a croissant-doughnut), "Duck Dynasty," Fifty Shades of Grey, planking (a core muscle exercise), Tebowing (dropping to your knee in prayer anywhere, anytime), boy bands, Furby, oxygen bars, pogs, the "Macarena." All fads. All discarded for the next fad.

The dictionary defines a “fad” as "an intense but short-lived fashion; craze; a temporary fashion, notion, or manner of conduct, especially one followed enthusiastically by a group."

All of which brings us to fads connected to the Bible, especially to passages describing the return of Jesus. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus says that "the stars will be falling from heaven,