

The Second Sunday Before Advent Year B

Mark 13.1-8 Hebrews 10.11-25

## What a week!

Headlines! What have you noticed...what has challenged you this week? What has distracted you? What has encouraged you?

As the Gospel of Mark describes the scene, Jesus is standing in the temple courtyard with his disciples, shortly after asking them to notice a widow surrendering her last two coins to the temple treasury. Dazzled by the architectural majesty surrounding them, one of the disciples asks Jesus to notice something in return: "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"

According to the 1<sup>st</sup> century historian, Josephus, the Jerusalem temple of Jesus's day was an awe-inspiring wonder. Newly reconstructed by Herod the Great, the temple's retaining walls were composed of stones forty feet long. The temple itself occupied a platform twice as large as the Roman Forum and four times as large as the Athenian Acropolis. Herod reportedly used so much gold to cover the outside walls that anyone who gazed at them in bright sunlight risked blinding herself.

Accordingly, the disciple in the story is impressed, and tries to share his sense of awe with Jesus. But Jesus isn't dazzled. Instead, he responds to the disciple's remark with a question: "Do you see these great buildings?" An odd response... Aren't the two of them seeing the same thing? Well, no. They're not. They're not seeing the same thing at all.

What the disciple sees is an architectural marvel, yes, but it's also the biggest, boldest, and most unshakeable symbol of God's presence he's capable of imagining. Those massive stones hold religious memory. They bolster a colonized people's identity.

They offer the faithful a potent symbol of spiritual glory, pride, and worthiness. In short, what takes the disciple's breath away as he gazes at the temple is the religious certainty and permanence those glittering stones display to the world.

*That's* what the disciple sees. But what does Jesus see?

He sees ruins. Rubble. Destruction. Fragility, not permanence. Loss, not glory. Jesus sees change...a change required in our outlook, a change in our thinking...a change needed in our idea of God, among us.

This passage from Mark's Gospel is often described as apocalyptic, look at what Jesus says... 'not one stone here will be left upon the other, all will be thrown down'...

Here, Jesus was not merely proclaiming destruction, of old structures and systems. He was prodding those listening to him to change the script, to change that which gets their attention, that which gets their loyalty. He was reminding them to live their life, following God in ways that made sense to them... but to yearn for something more. He was pushing them to look beyond what they saw, beyond the stones, beyond the buildings, beyond the beautiful structures and the other articles of worship, beyond what people are wearing or where they were schooled or what they do for a living, what roles, duties or positions we hold.

Jesus' conversation about the destruction of the temple was symbolic of the systems and institutions that oppress and exclude. He was talking about the end to the status quo and the birthing of justice, freedom, the redistribution, and/or redefinition of power and wealth and expectation...

We will all have had, throughout our lives, a sense of 'an apocalypse', as often referred to... in a modern cultural sense.

The signs of end times...or of times ending; especially in this last week - in politics and the uncertainty of a fair or any deal for us with Europe... in the leadership and governance of our country, in the wild fires of California, in the negative and fear mongering headlines that come at us, with alarming frequency; let alone our own personal struggles and challenges, in our own bodies, minds and spirits and in our own relationships with one another.

But the definition for biblical commentators of an apocalypse is of an unveiling or an *uncovering*. A disclosure of something secret and hidden. To experience an apocalypse is to experience fresh sight. Honest disclosure. Accurate revelation. It is to apprehend reality as we've never apprehended it before.

In this sense, what Jesus offers his disciples is an apocalyptic vision. He invites them to look beyond the grandeur of the temple, and recognize that God will not suffer domestication.

The temple is not the epicentre work; God is not bound by mortar and stone. God exceeds every, institution, every mission statement, every strategic plan, and every symbol or tradition human beings create in his name...and that is an incredible challenge for us...in our national church context today...with buildings to maintain, with communities needing more volunteer and church support, than ever before.

How can we continue to use what we have inherited, creatively, for the purposes of God, to make his love known, in the hearts and minds of those communities, in which we serve.

As I envision myself in the disciple's place, listening in bewilderment as Jesus pops my spiritual bubbles, here are some of the questions I'm asking of myself: perhaps I can invite you to ask the same of yourselves too...

- In what memories, traditions, or comfort zones do I attempt to “house” God?
- Why do I cling to permanence when Jesus invites me to evolve?
- Am I willing to sit with the fact that things fall apart? (Things I love, things I built, things I cried and prayed and strived for.)
- Can I embrace a journey of faith that includes rubble, ruin, and change.

In the second part of the Gospel story, Jesus teaches his disciples what to do and how to live when the walls come tumbling down, when our sense of how we are called to be, as disciples, living in a broken world as Christian communities, embracing change – challenges us to the core.

Jesus says, ‘do not be alarmed...this is but the beginning of the birth pangs’

Jesus is warning the disciples to hold their course, to be faithful, even in the face of suffering, even in the face of the cross, even in the face of chaos and change. It is a reminder to be aware of what it is and who it is in which you put your trust.

On what are you building your faith? What cost of discipleship are you willing to bear... to see God’s Kingdom fully expressed, in our life together and in true Christian witness to all around us... to the widow, the orphan, to those disillusioned by the world and the fear of future hope that is promoted and encouraged, in the world today...it was no different, for the first followers of Jesus!

And Just like those first disciples we too have our questions... of how and when the Kingdom will be fully seen...

In time. In God's time.

We would like to know when that is. But that is not our calling. We are called to live *now*, allowing the promises of God about the future to infuse our every present moment. Because when you live looking for the activity of God here and now, you begin to see it!

In an act of kindness of a friend, in an opportunity to help another, in the outreach ministry of a congregation, in the chance to listen deeply to the hurt of another...

Our Hebrews reading, reminds us to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, in building up one another with encouragement...especially in times of transition and change...even when the change is hard...

Jesus invites us all today to look again...at all around us, to fix our eyes on God's promises and our purpose, in serving him.... In this place, for this time. If we open our hearts, mind and our expectation to the will of God, we will see that God shows up in all kinds of unexpected places, working with us, for us, through us, and in us. We are challenged today.... to take another look... and fix our eyes on Jesus!

**Amen**