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Christ Episcopal Church - Towanda, Pa
25th Sunday after Pentecost- Year B- Proper 28
Nov 14, 2021 Mark 13: 1-8

Not a stone will be left

In today's gospel lesson Jesus is quoted as saying "Whenever you hear about wars and rumors of wars, don't be alarmed. These things have to happen, but it doesn't mean the end is here (Mark 13:7). "He went on to talk about nations and kingdoms rising up against each other, predicted earthquakes and famines and ended with, "These are the beginnings of the birth pangs." Today we here this cry as we listen to those who have been victims of disasters. There is profound yearning in these seemingly insurmountable obstacles.¹

As the world was chaotic in the year 70, so it is today. It's as if Jesus could be sitting atop Mt. Pisgah delivering his address. Despite the fact that this is the first time in decades that we are not in a ground war, our sense of peace and safety has increasingly disappeared within the last fifty years. The effects on our society loom large and wearying. Jesus' predictions of suffering apply not only to the nation but also to the family, the Church, and to each one of us as individuals.

Modern day people remember the "Left Behind" series which is **erroneously assumed by many to be authentic Christian teaching** with its sensationalistic production. It lays out an apocalyptic movement that preaches the coming Rapture when Jesus will snatch away the true believers up to heaven while relegating the rest of humanity and the created order to destruction. It leaves a depressing mark on an already traumatized human race.²

The doctrine of the Second Coming is a veritable minefield in our time. It is often used in a way that I refer to as weaponized religion, used to scare people by citing scripture using imagery that denigrates God's created order: describing a created order which seeks salvation **for the elect in the hereafter**, in complete disregard of our Lord's inclusive outreach to all. ³

My prayer partners in our Centering Prayer group this week voiced their struggle with what can be described as dualistic theology or binary thinking. By this I mean black and white thinking. There are winners and losers, some are in and others outside of God's saving grace. No wonder that many contemporary people of faith loose heart with this teaching. How often do we sinfully take on the judgement of who that may or may not be? I know that I have been guilty of this on occasion.

¹ David L. Bartlett, Barbara Taylor Brown. Feasting on the Word- Year B. Vol 4

²Fr. Han vandenBlink *Homily "Do not be alarmed" - Pentecost 24, Nov. 15 2009. P2*

³ Fr. Han vandenBlink, *The Role of Theology in Spiritual Formation* Session 4, Nov. 8 2009 p. 9-12

As Jesus sits with his disciples looking at the temple from across the way at the mount of Olives, he is looking on vast beauty, immense scale, a revered modern marvel of architectural structure and status. This temple was magnificent by all accounts. The Roman historian Tacitus described the temple complex as a mountain of white marble adorned with gold, a “temple immense wealth” The enormous stones mystified many as well as the surrounding complex including sprawling courtyards, colonnaded courts, grand porches and balconies, covered walkways and monumental stairs. Herod the great builder had built it to impress the wealthiest and most powerful rulers of the day, and he succeeded! ⁴

Mark uses imagery such as these mountains to symbolize the nearness of God. Jesus sits here, teaching his disciples about the coming destruction of the temple. Prophecy has placed Mount Olive as a locus in the last of days

One command that Jesus offers here is to remain calm in the unsettling events to come as the approaching natural disaster and human-created catastrophes are necessary. We recognize that then, as now, evil is rampant in the world, producing its own terror. How in God’s name do we remain calm or even sane? It’s no wonder we don’t run out of the pews and out of the church screaming. Fasten your seat belts my friends. There is good news and it is here we place the focus of our faith.

1. We know that **evil does not have the final say**. As Christians our faith is centered in hope, focusing on the love of God for his creation. John 1:5 instructs us that the light shines in the darkness and that darkness will not overcome it.

2. **Our faith is rooted in Jesus Christ and community**. Our focus cannot be on the signs to come -nor a static event, but on the one who enables us to look up after the devastation that occurs in our lives and claim the certainty of blessing **even in the midst of it**. Things may seem to have fallen apart. It may appear that anarchy has been loosed on the world. Nevertheless, the center holds and much to our amazement- we discover that we have much faithful work to do. Prayer, encouragement, and works of mercy(not pity) go a long way in the empowerment of people.

3. **Structures of the world (material) is nothing compared to the Kingdom of God (immaterial)**.

A mystic, Thomas Merton and contemplative offspring James Finley offer us a vision of owning a mansion. In owning this gorgeous place of many and beautiful rooms - we invite friends to come and see, however, we can’t get in! So what if we’ve been living there all our lives but by mental distortion we sense that we are in a little tent on the outside? Our own self-deceit and denigration cause us to believe that yes!, we are not there, but my friends, we are! Our human condition causes us to push back against this. Jesus has told us, the Kingdom of God is with you and within you. Our own tradition tells us that it is **in God that we live, and move and have our being. All is of God and in God. God is being offered to us in each and every heartbeat**. ⁵ This is the “Kingdom” Jesus is trying to express to the disciples. They, like us, could not and cannot see this for the most part.

⁴ Feasting on the World- *Ibid*

⁵ James Finley - Center for Action and Contemplation - *Turning to the Mystics - Thomas Merton Podcast 2/24/20*

In our human ignorance, we need to let ourselves be loved . God's love, giving itself to us is what we need to recognize, celebrate and foster in ourselves and in others for true salvation is a process of repentance, forgiveness, and new birth in our lives ⁶

We have made the difficult journey with Mark. Our liturgical season of Pentecost will end next Sunday , Nov. 21st with the Solemnity of Christ the King. The Eastern Church call Christ not king but Pantokrator, meaning the Ruler of All. No matter what is going on in us and around us, Christ the King, the Pantokrator who sustains us as he has the mystics and martyrs of the past, countless men and women of faith. It is that same ***Presence which sustains us both in life and death.***

And now to him, whose power in us can do more than we can ask or imagine, to him be the glory from this time forth and forevermore. Amen.

⁶ Feasting on the Word - *Ibid*