

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost-November 17, 2024

Introduction to themes for the day and the season

We approach the end of the church year where we've read Mark's Gospel. The reading is a dilly when it comes to endings and beginnings and it sets the stage for Advent waiting in a couple of weeks. The reading is also a real head scratcher.

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, your sovereign purpose brings salvation to birth. Give us faith to be steadfast amid the tumults of this world, trusting that your kingdom comes and your will is done through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord Amen.

Gospel: Mark 13:1-8 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

13 As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" **2** Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, **4** "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" **5** Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. **6** Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!'^[a] and they will lead many astray. **7** When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. **8** For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

SERMON

Wait, what? Where is that Gospel reading coming from? A respected commentator named Fred Craddock observes that you could take out this section of Mark's Gospel and the story would flow seamlessly. This chunk seems disjointed. Then again...

The first hearers and readers of Mark's Gospel could see with their own eyes the destroyed Temple Jesus foretold some forty years before. These folk lived in times when it likely felt as if the bottom had fallen out—No religious system could and no government would look out for the common good. Folk need reminding that God hasn't abandoned them.

A useful word for understanding this part of Mark's Gospel is "apocalypse"—the word literally means uncovering or revealing. The way Jesus speaks about the temple and calamities to come sounds very apocalyptic; much like the prophet Daniel or even one called John who wrote the Apocalypse we know as the book of Revelation.

What's being uncovered? The stories about Jesus denouncing the corruption in Temple practices like extorting poor widows and his chasing out the money changers both serve to warn us against putting all our faith in institutions; even religious ones. Such a comment sounds tepid in a week we've heard news that the archbishop of Canterbury resigned this after it was learned he knowingly allowed sexual abuse to happen under his watch and tried to cover things up.

We have ample life experience and a flood of news events that strip away illusions that we can build and fortify secure systems or even lives. Temples don't last. Governments crumble or get toppled. The truth might set us free it's going to first freak us out and we need to grieve. We need to lament. It's been pointed out that we're not great at that in church...earlier hymnals took out the psalms of lament and our later ones are correcting that and even including songs of lament...a pandemic taught us that we're fragile and we need to grieve.

It's callous and unrealistic to expect people to just get over it. Our new bishop has extensive study and work experience around grief. As painful things are uncovered new possibilities are revealed sometimes. Bishop Carla says it's important to oscillate between honouring and mourning a past we've lost and learning to build and live in a future we can't see. Either end can overwhelm us which is why it's important to move back and forth as we need to.

The Good and Gospel truth in all of this is that God is with us in beginnings and endings and in our grief and in our joy. God is with us as we list to and fro between mourning a lost past and stumbling into an unknown future. When things we thought we could always count on give out or let us down, God is with us. Here. Now. Always. Amen.