



Sunday's Sermon

Pastor Lara Forbes



Growing Together in Christ to Love and Serve All People

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

November 14, 2021

Daniel 12:1-3

Mark 13:1-8

Grace to you and peace from God, our creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, we're nearing the end of the church year - next Sunday is the last Sunday and then Advent begins. And with the end of the church year come readings about destruction. Today we hear it in Daniel and in Mark's gospel. And a lot of people get caught up in the words on the page and take them at face value, and forget that there's more to the message - especially when we only get a piece of the story like we do today.

But at their core, both of these readings are about trust - meaning, they ask us to consider in what and in whom we put our trust. And they remind us to put our trust in God because God will never fail us.

In times of chaos, this trust - this relationship, keeps us grounded; it keeps us from panicking and being lured away by the most current false prophet or promise. Because God can never be destroyed or taken away from us.

At the time Mark's gospel was written, the early Christians were enduring intense persecution. And in the part leading up to today's reading, Jesus exposed the temple system as one that exploited people who were vulnerable.

So to hear Jesus say that, and then have one of his disciples be impressed by the temple architecture is almost like whiplash. Because Jesus wasn't impressed with the Temple.

But to give some perspective to this, the Temple was under construction when Jesus was alive - it wasn't completed until about thirty years after he died. And it is said that the "large stones" were 35' long by 18' wide by 12' high.

Its platform was twice as large as the Roman Forum and four times as large as the Athenian Acropolis. And it's reported that so much gold was used to cover the outside walls that anyone who looked at them in bright sunlight risked being blinded.

So what the disciple saw was an architectural masterpiece - and for him, it also was the best image of God's presence that he could imagine. For the disciple, the temple represented certainty and permanence.

But he didn't see the same thing Jesus did. In a sense, the disciple was blinded by what he saw. Because when Jesus looked at the temple, he saw ruins and destruction and loss. He saw change and possibility and new life.

¹What Jesus talks about here is often described as “apocalyptic.” And that’s a word that tends to scare people; but an apocalypse is an unveiling, a revelation or disclosure of something that is hidden. And to experience an apocalypse is to experience a new way of looking at things and to understand reality in a new way.

In this sense, Jesus *does* offer his disciples an apocalyptic vision - a new way of seeing and understanding things. And for the people who first heard this gospel, the ones who were being persecuted for their faith and who likely witnessed the *destruction* of the temple, that newness gave them hope in a time when they desperately needed it.

It gave them the courage to look beyond what was in front of them and to remember that God isn’t bound by mortar and stone, and that the temple isn’t the center of God’s work. Jesus’ new way of seeing and understanding things called their community to continue to love and encourage one another no matter what was going on around them. Trusting God, living faithfully, was to be their focus - not the status of the temple or anything else.

Jesus’ call to trust God hasn’t changed. And in a time like ours when *so much* has changed so fast, it’s more important than ever that we pay attention to that.

We’re constantly faced with the temptation to find fast and easy answers and fixes to things. We want to know what’s going to happen when, so that if we don’t like it we can prevent it - or at least prepare for it. We want to know when it’s going to be over so that we can maybe hurry things along.

But I think, in the church, the biggest temptation we face is to have things go back to the way they were before. When it was standing room only on Sunday mornings, and the Sunday school classrooms were full, and the budget was stable, and things seemed to be secure. We want that back because that’s what we know.

It’s hard to live faithfully, and to trust God, when so much is changing and it doesn’t seem to be slowing down. But when we get caught up in wanting things the way they used to be, we become blind to the ways God is working in and among us right now. We overlook the ministry that’s already happening, and we don’t see the potential for *new* ministry and ways of being church.

But as we live through these changes together - as we work through the discomfort and the unknown and the unexpected, we come to understand that any sense of control that we *think* we have is false. And that our faith, our trust in God - in Jesus - is the best and only preparation we need for whatever might happen.

Because God is the one who holds us fast when it feels like the world is coming down around us. God outshines and outlasts any building or system that humans create. That’s where we find our life, our hope, and our truth.

When Mark wrote this gospel, the early Christians’ faith was being tested in such a way that their lives literally depended on it. They knew that buildings and people don’t last forever - no matter how powerful or mighty they seem to be.

²And they also knew that God’s Messiah had assured his followers that death and destruction aren’t the final chapter in the story of God’s people. Because in the same way stones can be thrown down from a building to reveal an ending, they can also be rolled away from a tomb to reveal a new beginning.

As people of faith, remembering in what and in whom we put our trust is foundational to who we are as God’s people. When we put it in God, we live knowing that God will never fail us.

In times of chaos, this trust - this relationship, keeps us grounded; it keeps us from panicking and being lured away by any false prophet or promise. Because no matter what else changes, God can never be destroyed or taken away from us. Thanks be to God! Amen.

1 <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=2010>

2 Rev. Dr. Audrey West