

Sermon Mark 13:1-8  
November 17, 2021  
CCM

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Does it ever feel as if everything we have counted on all our lives has come undone? Have you checked the news recently?

My friends, while we might spend our lifetimes denying it, this truth remains: One day, the great buildings and structures that we now know in life will fall. The very things that we so often trust and rely upon that give identity, meaning, purpose, and security will crumble.

Please know, I am not trying to predict the future nor am I up here to proclaim “doom and gloom” this morning. I am merely stating reality. Life changes. Loved one die. Institutions considered “too big to fail”, well, they fail. People disappoint us. Relationships break up. Backs go out. We grow older. This is a transitory life. “Earth to earth...ashes to ashes...dust to dust”

If truth is to be known, each of us is a “temple builder”. We build all sorts of temples as we move through life: personas, roles, reputations, accomplishments, cherished beliefs and opinions. We build these temples with the idea that they will contain and support our lives forever and forever more. The problem here is not in the building of these temples but it is in the expectation that they will do more than they actually can. You see, too often we confuse the structure for the content, the place of divinity for the Divine. Stone upon stone we build our temples with the expectation that these structures will provide ultimate meaning in our lives, impenetrable security, permanent order, and unchanging direction for our lives and for our world.

And then, in a blink of an eye, a wall of fire roars through our neighborhood and reduces it all to ashes. A hurricane blows everything away. The ice caps melt, the seas rise, and our homes, both spiritual and otherwise, end up underwater.

The temple that we just heard about in this morning’s Gospel passage was more than just a building in Jerusalem, more than just a place of worship. It was the center and anchor of life for the people of Israel. It provided identity, structure, and meaning just like our temples of today. And it was, in size and scale, a most impressive structure. Indeed, it was magnificent. The disciples were certainly impressed. “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” They are certainly taken by its outward appearance.

And yet, their Rabbi is not impressed. This, according to Mark's Gospel, is Jesus' third and last visit to the great temple in Jerusalem. The first time, he went in, looked all around at everything and left (Mark 11:11). The second time he went into the temple, he drove out the buyers and sellers, overturned the moneychangers' tables, and left (Mark 11:27-12:40). In Mark 11:41-44, he sat across the valley and observed a poor widow "putting in everything she had, all she had to live on" in the temple treasury.

And now, as he leaves the temple for the last time, he asks his disciples, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." This is not a threat. Jesus is not speaking here in anger. It is simply a statement of truth. It is a statement of faith. One day, this will happen. And of course, it did happen.

Regardless of how or when it comes about, all these temples we have been so busily constructing will come down and our worlds will be changed forever. Now, when they start to shake, our temptation will be to try and shore them all up. Grab a little duck tape, plaster and mortar, make it a little stronger, put it all back together as best we can.

But that's not what Jesus says to do. We are not to be afraid when these things come to pass. We are not to be afraid. Instead, we are to remain faithful and not be led astray by false prophets. We are to be watchful, present to the living God, and attentive. It is a time for patient waiting. It is time for trusting. In short, It is just about time for the season of Advent.

You see, with God, these times are not so much about destruction as they are about revelation. By definition, revelation means that something we have held so dearly has to give way. With every real revelation, the walls of some formerly held conviction must come tumbling down. Yes, this can be painful, watching our old temples crumble. But truth and beauty are revealed in that fall.

Fallen temples confront us, forcing us to decide between reality and illusion, and yes, between life and death. These times ask us hard questions about where and in whom we put our trust. These are the days in which we begin to face our corruptibility and impermanence so that we might know the incorruptibility and permanence of God. These are days in which we come to terms with our temporal nature so that we might better understand God's eternal nature and God's eternal love.

You see, these days are the birth pangs. Fallen temples are not so much about loss and destruction as they are about birth and creation. Our God has, is, and always will be, The God of Hope, the God of Joy, the God of Life, not the God of death. In God, the old gives way to the new, death gives way to life, destruction gives way to creation.

So I wonder this morning. What temples in our lives are falling, or indeed need to fall? In these days, when so much seems to be coming undone, what new truths and realities are being revealed to us? And how might that God, who has known you and loved you from before the beginning of time and will love you after time comes to an end, how might that same God be creating and birthing new life in you in these present days? For while our temples may abandon us, God never does. That is the Gospel truth. Amen.