

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
26th Sunday after Pentecost/Year B/Proper 28
Nov. 18, 2018
Text: Mark 13:1-8

We can always tell that we are coming close to the end of another liturgical year. The gospels are always a dead giveaway as they speak of end times and today is no different.

We are reminded that one day the great buildings and structures in our lives will crumble and fall. The very things we've worked hard for and those things we relied on for identity, stability, and security will go away. This is not a forecast of doom and gloom but just how things are. Life changes as do our circumstances and relationships. Our bodies get old. Family, friends die. Institutions, businesses, even churches that thrived years ago are on the verge of closing or perhaps no longer exist. That ring or bracelet or pair of earrings that we once cherished is now tarnished or lost. In those moments those great stones of our temples are shattered, toppled over.

We build all sorts of temples, don't we? Our roles in society, reputations, homes, careers, dreams, opinions, hopes, expectations, 401Ks, nest eggs-all in the quest for order, stability, recognition, and security. Not at all bad things unless we forget that there is more to life than the "material things" like making room for God.

The temple in this morning's gospel is more than just another building in the City of Jerusalem. It is a massive and magnificent stone structure where eons of people prayed and made sacrifices. It was the center of life and for the Jewish people who went there, it was the place where God dwelled.

As Jesus and his disciples were leaving the temple they stopped to admire its beauty. And one of them spoke up and said, "*Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!*" But Jesus did not join in their enthusiasm of the humongous and ornate edifice. In what has been called Mark's "little apocalypse" Jesus told his companions that the temple that they and their people had come to love and admire for hundreds of years would one day come tumbling down. God would dwell there be no more. Their world as they knew it would end. "*Do you*

see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” How is that for leaving someone shocked and speechless!

Of course, later the inner foursome want to know: When will it happen? What will be the signs? What shall we do? And we the readers must stop here and realize that in this narrative the disciples were asking about the *Temple*. Jesus’ reply is not just a prophecy about the end of the world or space and time, the day when all will see “*the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory,*” but of another end—the destruction of the Temple—the end of “a” world as known by first century Jews. By the time Mark wrote this text, roughly 40 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, this prophecy about the temple being destroyed came true or was about to. Historians say the Jewish-Roman War occurred during 66-70 CE (or Christian era) and it was during that time the Temple was laid to waste. To first century Jews that was the disaster of disasters, the end of the world as they knew it.

Throughout the centuries humankind has similarly repeated the disciples’ same questions with fear and fascination. We want to know what the future might hold and how we can recognize the signs of *the* end times. The world has experienced for countless years, wars and rumors of wars. Nations rising against nations. Famines continue to happen somewhere on this great planet Earth. And there have been earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions. Wildfires in California continue to burn out of control. Can we say, global warming??? The minds of some human beings have run amok and there have been one too many mass killings and other acts of violence and terrorism. The ugly heads of prejudice and bigotry have both reared up. Just this past week a man in Baltimore shouted, “Heil Hitler! Heil Trump!” during intermission of a production of “Fiddler on the Roof.” People are calling on law enforcement almost on a daily basis on people of color who are doing nothing more than doing ordinary things, living their lives. And in a manner of speaking, the world ends each day for somebody. A grim diagnosis here, the end of a relationship or a job there, and more and more parents are finding themselves burying a child who overdosed or took their own life just to stop the bullying. On top of all of this, there are some evangelists and street corner preachers and other individuals reading tea leaves and raising the alarm that the end is near.

Jesus never promised to shield his followers from threats or the craziness of human beings or life itself. Stuff happens. Things change. And as Troy Maxim said in the play, “*Fences*”, “You got to take the bitter with the sweet.” What Jesus said to his disciples applies to us as well. And that is, do not allow anyone to lead

you astray and do not be swayed by fake messiahs. And do not be alarmed by coming wars or rumors of wars or earthquakes or famines. “*Do not be alarmed,*” he says to us. ‘Do not be afraid.’ All of what was and is to come are “*the beginning of birth pangs.*’ Or as we say today, ‘the beginning of labor pains.’ The beginning of something God is making brand new. *God is laboring!* Believe it or not! Laboring even now, making something new in us too.

Yes, we are to be ready for *The End*. So do keep awake and alert! Watchful! But there are other ends, other moments when temples will come crashing down, when what we know about life and living will change. Yet not all is gloom and doom and despair. Instead of fretting and worrying this is what the Savior expects of us all: continue to spread the Good News. Continue to love and serve God and your neighbor. Have faith and live in joy and confidence. Believe and trust that God is in control.

And yes, you and I are to be the people of God, people of hope. I think Bishop Smith said it well yesterday as he gave his sermon address at convention. He said hope is not living with ‘pie in the sky ideals’ or with the notion that *everything* is going to be alright (because many times, it isn’t). Hope is not seeing life through rose colored glasses BUT knowing and believing that come what may-Christ/God awaits us in the end.

We are to be busy about God’s business in the world. And remember that in the midst of changes and endings God is present and promises new life, making all things new. Of this we can be reassured!

Amen!