

The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
November 18, 2018

Mark 13:1-8

Let us pray...*Eternal God, you have committed to us the swift and solemn trust of life. And, since we do not know what any day may bring but only that the hour for serving you is present, awaken in us the instant claims of your holy will, not waiting for tomorrow, but yielding today. In Jesus name we pray, Amen*

Today's Gospel has never been pure pleasure for the preacher – the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world. You have to stretch these more than just a little to fit them under the term, “good news.” And, as heavy as my heart is for the holocaust that was Jerusalem in 70 AD – 6,000 refugees perishing in the flames of the Temple, over a million Jews put to the sword, 1,000's hustled off in chains to Rome – I'll not dwell on this.

Rather, I suggest we not focus on the Holy City but on the whole world. To do this, make gospel sense of it, I suggest three questions. First, the word you've heard, why *this* gospel on *this* day? Then, the relation of that word to the real world, what is the church trying to tell us? And, finally, the meaning of that word for day-to-day Christian living, how should you and I react? Why What How.

First the word just proclaimed. Why this somber word today? Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines. Why not something pleasant, encouraging, hopeful?

Well, understand that the scripture readings for each Lord's Day are not some helter-skelter, haphazard selection of readings. Each Sunday our worship is the whole church celebrating the story of salvation, reliving it, make it a reality in our lives. Each twelve months the cycle is repeated. We not only re-read it, we re-present it. We make God's wonderful works effectively present in us.

We began late last year with Advent, when we relived the whole world's expectation of its Savior, made ready to receive salvation into our hearts. We embraced him when he came, God enfolded in the straw of a manger. We grew up with him in history – three silent decades followed by three dynamic years. We walked the ways of Palestine in his company as he preached ceaselessly that the Kingdom of God was in our midst. We shared his last supper, sweated his blood in Gethsemane, ached with Mary beneath the cross, and looked on helplessly as he died for us. We rose with him at Easter and spied on him and Mary in the garden. In him, we too ascended to his Father, his spirit descending on each of us who believe. In the months since Pentecost's wind and flame, we have captured with our ears and experienced in our lives the mission of the church, shared its endless effects go grow in Christ. All the while we waited in hope for the coming of the Lord, this time not imprisoned in infancy but trailing clouds of glory.

And, now the final act of the liturgical drama is upon us. Next week the curtain will fall. On Christ the King Sunday we will crown the king of hearts. But not quite yet. Today we ritualize; we celebrate in anticipation the next to last scene. We are rounding out in ritual the story that began on Holy Writ's first page, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” It's that same story which ends on scripture's last page, “Amen, come Lord Jesus.”

This summons the second issue, the relation of the word you just heard to the world you inhabit. What's the church trying to tell us?

Now, here you have to be careful, careful to separate the message from the props, the essential message of Jesus from the stage props he uses. What stage props? “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” (vs. 2) And, “...wars, rumors of wars, false messiahs, earthquakes, famines...” (vs8)

Do know that the Gospel today is not a lesson in building demolition or political science or global agriculture. These are just apocalyptic props, the imaginative setting for twin truth – the world as we know it will come to some sort of an end, and that end will come when the Son of Man comes with power and great glory.

You see, today’s message as we near the end of the church year, is that the world as we have come to experience it is not the last act in the salvation story. At some point – I know not when – this paradoxical planet in which God’s images dance in delight and perish in pain, where a billion grow fat while a billion go hungry, where crucified love walks hand in hand with crucified hate - this kind of existence that you and I experience will not last forever. It’s a prelude, an overture, if you will. It’s important because it will usher in the Kingdom of God in its fullness.

This leads, in my own convoluted logic, to the third point, the meaning of what you’ve heard for day-to-day Christian living. While waiting for Christ to come again, how should we act, how should we live?

The answer is rather simple. Live as though the Lord were coming tomorrow. And, perhaps he is. There are Christians, who claim he will come tomorrow, or the next day, or the next, or the next... They find every sign of the end in our generation – wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines.

Is that the way it’s going to be? Maybe. But that’s not the point. We don’t begin to live like Christians just because the end may be in sight. This isn’t some Lutheran lottery – put a dollar in the plate and take your guess when Christ is coming again.

No, whenever the Lord is coming – today, tomorrow, 2012, a thousand years from now – our task is to live as though he were arriving this afternoon. Better still, if he were already here, because he is!

Yes, someday he will come in power and glory to place all creation at the feet of his Father. But today he comes subtly, invisibly wherever you are.

Don’t look for him in a pink cloud or with a bejeweled crown. Looked for him in the preached word and the host you cradle in your hand and pillow on your tongue. Look for him inside you and on the faces of your dear ones. Look for him especially where he told you to look – in the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and naked, the sick and imprisoned. Simply go where people are, particularly people who hurt, look into someone’s eyes, listen a little, and the Lord will tell you what to do.

When Christ comes again he will like what he sees only if you are preparing the kind of kingdom he proclaimed. A kingdom where reconciliation reigns, love lingers, and peace prevails. That kingdom is conceived not in Washington or Harrisburg or even Old Main but where each of you operates – in each human heart. Every time you advance God’s kingdom in some way on the acre of God’s turf you trod each day, Christ comes again – to you and through you.

Isn’t it so?