

Sermon for ORNC 17.11.24 (Mark 13.1-8)

“Do not be alarmed”! That’s the first thing, I have to say about today’s gospel.

And it’s the same intention which Jesus told the disciples too: “Do not be alarmed. Do not be disturbed or troubled by all these things, and do not be frightened.”

But Jesus also told the disciples, that he’s not talking about an ending, but about a beginning of new life. He’s describing a movement toward wholeness, fullness, and completion too. This gospel continues the theme of “making all things new”, especially when it looks as if so many things are coming apart at the seams, in the world, even today?

Today’s gospel, though seem damning, overflows with good news. Though it’s difficult and challenging, it’s worth all our attention and effort. It’s a gospel about hope, about opportunities and possibilities. A gospel about finding meaning in new life, and beginnings. It’s a gospel about our futures, both as individuals and as a society as a whole. Our responsibilities to one another, especially when we become alarmed; about the things that are going on around us, both locally and globally.

So often, when we become concerned about the future, we’re not really focused on the unknown, and a time yet to come. We’re really more focused on the present time, and so questions and doubts, as to whether accomplishments in our lives, will continue to give identity, meaning, and security. What we have created for our lives, such as our wellbeing, and happiness, will remain intact? Are the very foundations of our lives, stable and strong enough, to last to the bitter end?

In other words, we’re focused on the large stones and large buildings in our lives.

So when I hear Jesus say: “Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down,” I get a bit worried. Jesus says the very things, that I am most focused on, and possibly seem to be crashing down around me. I can’t help but wonder, if I’ve missed the point and been distracted from what really matters from a life in Christ, which is waiting for me. Maybe that’s what is going on with the disciple who says to Jesus: “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” Maybe he’s missed the point too, and distracted himself from what really matters? Perhaps, what the disciple said, doesn’t make much sense? This surely wasn’t the first time this disciple, had been or seen the temple. He had probably grown up going to the temple. He had gone to the temple with Jesus at least twice before this day, which is noted in previous passages of the Gospel. The large stones and buildings of the temple, were not new to him. Also, there’s a disconnect between what he says and what has just happened. Jesus and his disciples have just left the temple, where they sat opposite the treasury, watching the crowd put money into the treasury plate. Many rich people put in large sums, but we recall in the parable of the poor widow, who put in one penny, which was all that she had. Jesus noticing this, says to his disciples: “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.” With those words, Jesus has cracked the mortar between the stones of power, wealth, prestige, reputation, position, and security. Jesus holds up the widow as an example, as one who has no wealth and power, or position in society. But the first thing, the disciple says is: “Look how glorious this building is.” I wonder if this disciple is trying to change the subject, and distract himself from what Jesus has just said?

So often, when we change the subject or distract ourselves, is a way of not having to deal with the vulnerable, painful, or broken parts in our lives. I wonder if the disciple, is sensing the large stones and buildings of his life, are beginning to shift and separate? So often, it is felt like a separation, when not facing the truth about oneself. Or when the values we claim for ourselves, are not the values we speak of or live by. Sometimes it happens when accomplishments are used to avoid facing the need to change. It separates us from God, and denying ourselves the lives, which God has set before us. Somewhere in that separation, there's usually a conflict or division within us, or between us and another. Jesus comments on this, similar to wars and rumours. Where nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. Where there will be earthquakes and famines. Every one of those is an image of separation of some sort, which describe not only what is happening around us in the physical and natural world, but also within us. It is this, which is the hard and challenging part of today's gospel. It's showing and telling us, something we don't want to see, hear, or even deal with.

However, they may not been separations that destroy, but separations that create beginnings? What if they are an opening, a space, for something new to come to life? Jesus is never more compassionate than he is during these times, and often speaks with such tenderness and reassurance. "Do not be alarmed." "This must take place." It's as if he saying "don't worry". This is the path which is set before us, and one we take in our daily lives. Perhaps we need to take a look at our lives today, and ask: "What are the large stones and large buildings of our lives, that are being thrown down, or need to be thrown out?"

The Gospel tells us, not just how the disciples were taken back, by the splendour of the Temple building. But Jesus simply reminds us, not to be overwhelmed by such things. And this answer which Jesus gives, wasn't quite the answer the disciples were expecting. As we see shortly afterwards, sitting opposite the Temple on the Mount of Olives, they ask him again: "*Tell us, when will this be and what will be the sign?*" The disciples are so eager to establish, when the destruction of the Temple will be, because if the Temple falls, so does the established ruling orders.

Just like the disciples, it is a natural human desire, wanting to know when things are going to happen. The sense of not knowing, of the "when and how", so often makes us anxious.

But Jesus' answers in a way, not to satisfy curiosity, but to affirm that all material things, will not last forever, but the Kingdom of God does. We need to trust in God, and we need trust in Jesus, and in his teachings too. Jesus is not concerned with the material things of this world, like the great stones of the Temple, or of the modern material things of today. Jesus is concerned with the quality of life itself, and the lives of his disciples, and society generally today. The primary task of our Christian lives, is in the duty to follow him, and live out his teachings in complete trust, and stand firm in our faith. It is through God's grace, who has called us to serve, one another in his kingdom, here on earth. That is our calling, unique to each one of us.

Our Christian focus, is on the task in hand. We're not to be distracted by the noise of Troubles which are around us, nor are we to be troubled. All of these things are for us to endure, so that we can become stronger, and it is only through God's love, that we become spiritually stronger together, as God's people. Whatever we

have be entrusted with, as disciples today, it is to follow Jesus Christ through the joys and the turmoil of life. To bring about the message of the good news.

It is how we respond to the daily challenges, and how we live through them, and together as God's people, underlines out faith in God. Because, the world is, and will continue to be full of troubles, full of distractions, whether at the hand of nature, or at the hand of mankind. But Jesus teaches us, not to be full of them, (though mindful in order to respond), but to be full of God's, gracious love, and perseverance.

To stand firm in our faith, which will enable each of us, to be the very living stones, And building blocks, of God's Kingdom here on earth. **Amen.**



