

Sermon Text – Sunday, November 14, 2021 – Pastor Paula Kraus

OT Reading: 1 Samuel 2:1-10, NT Reading: Hebrews 10:11-25

Gospel Reading: Mark 13: 1-8 – Words of Hope

The Tuesday Morning Bible Study group just finished a study of The Difficult Words of Jesus – and here are more difficult words. Words that we must wrestle with and words that tell us things many of us don't want to hear, because we either don't understand them completely or we think we do understand and are fearful; but maybe we are wrong?

This passage from Mark immediately follows what we read last week. Jesus and his disciples remain seated on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple. The disciples admire the workmanship of the Temple, the large stones and large buildings created by human hands. Jesus' response to them is as much observation as it is prediction. Jesus acknowledges that work of human hands cannot endure. That the stones of these beautiful buildings will be toppled upon themselves. This reminds the disciples not to put their trust and faith in worldly things; empires come and empires go God alone is eternal.

Maybe to understand what Jesus says we should try to understand the significance of the temple at that time. The people considered the Temple the dwelling place of God where Jewish and Gentile believers of Christ worshipped. The Temple in Jerusalem was the only place they knew to approach the God they worshipped. How could the home of a powerful deity, the God they worshipped, be destroyed? Did this mean that God was not all powerful? Did this mean God will reject them?

But notice that Jesus sits opposite the Temple, and with his words assures those with him that the Temple is no longer the focal point for the Kingdom of God. The Temple created by human hands will not endure, but the end is not yet. In other words, the destruction of the Temple is not the final word of God – there's more. From Hebrews 10:11 we have an indication of the futility of sacrifices, day after day offered again and again but the priests could not remove sin. The preacher [writer of Hebrews] acknowledges that only through Jesus can the sins of the world be atoned for – once for all. The time for the Temple therefore has passed, there is a new location of God's dwelling – Jesus the Christ.

Our section of scripture from Mark chapter thirteen begins a longish discourse on the "end times" and is a fitting chapter to read as we look toward Advent and as we wait for Jesus' return. These first eight verses give us a glimpse into how Jesus answers the question the disciples ask, "When will this be, and

what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” (verse 4).

When the Gospel of Mark was written, probably about the same time as the Roman / Jewish conflicts which resulted in the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. These words would have meant more to those Mark writes to as they also ask the question, “When will the suffering end?” At that time the people were longing for religious and political freedom from Roman imperialism. The words of Jesus could bring hope – there will be rumors of war, nation against nation, the earth will be in turmoil – but the end is not yet [still to come]. These things must happen.

In his response Jesus may be telling his disciples that if they focus on when these things will happen and what the signs will be, then it is almost impossible for them to have the faith necessary to live in the present. Jesus never says when, only that these things will happen. Jesus presents a message that we must live by faith, trusting in God’s promises.

I am guessing that many of us wonder what the final days will be like. That may be the reason many try to study the book of Revelation, or the other apocalyptic literature of the bible. We all might have a certain amount of anxiety related to that day of final judgment. So, we seek answers and listen to the many who try to predict. We watch “End of Times” movies and documentaries that predict when these things will happen. We listen to scholars who give us interpretations of scripture along with their predictions – but these are just human attempts to explain the divine. No one knows when these things will be, only God knows.

Jesus tells us to BEWARE, so that no one leads us astray. Many will come and will lead many astray – and this is happening even now. The things Jesus tells his disciples about have been happening over and over again since the time Jesus first spoke of them, but the end is still to come. Jesus words remind us too that some events of the end times will be acts of God, i.e., earthquakes, floods, famine, etc. but others will be acts of human beings either a result of poor human decisions or evil acts. And we know that this certainly has happened over and over, bad actions bad decisions day after day, decade after decade, century after century. You’ve heard me comment that we stand in tension with the already and the not yet and that is what Jesus is telling us. These things have already happened, we are in the beginning, but the end is not yet, that day of final judgment is not yet here.

When Jesus tells his disciples that “These are the beginning of birth pains” we should heed those words. Jesus does not claim that the faithful will not be around to feel the “pain” of judgment. In fact, nowhere in chapter thirteen of this

Gospel does Mark relate Jesus telling his disciples they would escape persecution – only that it will END. Christians will not suffer endless torment; Christians however must endure the final days.

Are we dreading or looking forward to that day of Jesus' return? What are some of the things we fear and why? When we think of the image of the temple, those large stones and large buildings being thrown down – does it frighten us to think it may happen to us? We, many of us, fear death, suffering and persecution. Many of us fear losing everything. We fear the unknown, and we try to find some answers, so we can know what to look for.

When I think about the image of the temple stones being toppled one on another, I also think of how that happens in lives too. I recall a person I knew who for all outward appearances was healthy, a runner and took care of himself until one day while running he dropped dead leaving a family devastated. I recall stories of people who built fantastic lives with beautiful homes, were comfortable in their living, and were faithful to God until one day an accident took everything they had. I've heard people at funerals say, "I just talked to him [or her] the other day and they seemed fine." Think about the people who lost their homes and livelihoods in the California fires or the hurricanes in the Gulf or the southern states. Everything we build our lives on can be thrown down in an instance through circumstances beyond our control. Nothing on this earth is forever, only God is eternal.

What are your fears? Do you fear the fiery pit of hell? Do you wonder if you are a good enough Christian for God to rescue from hell? Are you hoping for more time? Jesus tells us to "Beware that no one leads you astray."

Do these difficult words of Jesus make you fearful or do they bring hope? I want you to leave here today knowing these are indeed words of hope.

These words remind us that when these horrible events happen in our lives and the lives of others, the end is not yet – endure for there is more time. We don't know when this will happen, and our hope remains in the fact that we are promised the end will come even if we won't know when. We aren't promised that we won't experience pain, suffering, or loss. We are only promised that it will end. We wait and we watch, trying to be faithful to God in the promise.

Where do we turn in the face of such fearful apocalyptic images? When our lives are 'thrown down' who can help us pick up the pieces? We turn to the cross and to Jesus Christ. We have God's faithful love of creation as a promise that all is not lost – the end is not yet. How do we remain faithful during times of trouble? We trust God who goes with us into death and raises us into new life.

We are living in a time where there are wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation, inflation and market decline, political unrest, climate change, and

global pandemic. Is this the end? Jesus tells us that these are the beginning of birth pains. Jesus' return will happen when it happens. Our hope comes from knowing it WILL happen. God promises a new heaven and earth. God is faithful and we can be assured God will fulfill that promise. What is God waiting for? God waits for us – Jesus waits for us.

I just want to close this message with another scripture from the book of Daniel, another one of the apocalyptic writings in our bible. I am reading Daniel 12:1-3 from the Hebrew bible.

“At that time, the great prince, Michael, who stands beside the sons of your people, will appear. It will be a time of trouble, the like of which has never been since the nation came into being. At that time, your people will be rescued, all who are found inscribed in the book. Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence. And the knowledgeable will be radiant like the bright expanse of the sky, and those who lead the many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever.”

These are God's sure and true promises, believe them. We don't know when this will happen, but we can be sure it will and those are the words of hope.