

Confidence and Trust Well-Placed 2021
Mark 13:1-8, 32-33

Mark 13:1-8, 32-33 (New Revised Standard Version)

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

Between 7th and 8th grade my family moved to the Washington DC area.
One afternoon we drove out to see and tour Reston,
a planned community that was just being built.

With all of its ultra-modern architectural design,
it was reminiscent of that old 1960's TV show, “The Jetsons”,
and to me, a most impressive look into the future.

Some 20 or so years later,
I was having lunch with a client at an outdoor café in Reston,
and I noticed that several buildings at city center
were cracking, peeling and crumbling in places.

It struck me that those same buildings that I had thought were so
amazing, futuristic, majestic and indestructible,
had deteriorated and were simply not going to last.

The passage in Mark 13 describes how the disciples were amazed...
... perhaps like rural visitors gawking at New York City skyscrapers,
and so impressed by the majesty of the Temple in Jerusalem
that it seemed to immense and solid, sure to last forever.

The Temple was one of the greatest wonders of the ancient world,
an impressive structure rising 70 feet up from Mount Moriah,
with its white and gold walls visible from many miles away...
... a remarkable human achievement expected to last for all time. vs. 1-2

As he (Jesus) came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

The disciples must have been stunned by his words ---
for surely the great Temple would stand and last forever,
and so, when they were alone, they asked Jesus, vs. 4~6, 32-33

"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"

Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray... Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray..."

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

I find it fascinating how literally those words were fulfilled.

The Roman general Titus had the Temple deliberately burned down,
and then scavengers pried the Temple stones apart
trying to get at the precious metals that had melted
and seeped down between the stones during the fire...

... **but Jesus was doing much more than just predicting a future event.**

Jesus spoke those challenging words to his disciples

who would see and experience the Temple completely destroyed,
and he wanted them to **remain faithful and hopeful**
even amid that disaster and terrible upheaval.

Their task was to be & build the Church by making disciples,
by living in faith, hope and trust **instead of fear & panic.**

His message was, don't put your trust or confidence in human works,
for however impressive those achievements may seem,
ultimately they will all fail and they will not stand.

In addition to that,

don't follow those **who claim** they have figured out God's mysteries,
for God alone knows the when, the how and the why of the future.

The Gospel of Mark was written

during a time growing rebellion against the Roman occupation.
Some Jewish zealots were teaching and claiming as prophecy,
that now was the time as promised in Scripture,
when God would miraculously restore the nation of Israel.

And by repeating these words spoken by Jesus, through this passage
Mark was urging them not follow those false prophets and leaders,
or assume that rebellion against Rome
would usher in the promised Kingdom of God.

Actually, when Jesus spoke those words of Mark 13,

he knew he was going to be crucified in a couple of days,
and that for the disciples and his followers,
it would feel like their whole world had just ended.

The message was, **just because there is anxiety, upheaval and chaos,**
that does not mean that it is the end of the world! ...

... and after the resurrection, the Church was to remember that lesson.

Jesus wanted them to hang in there with strength and courage

by knowing and trusting that despite
the terrifying and threatening events going on around them,
God was in charge **and fulfilling his wonderful purpose.**

The point to us, there will always be some struggle and tribulation.
You may feel afraid, anxious, discouraged or disappointed,
but don't assume that means it's the end of the world.

Our true hope is that through it all, we can trust that God is with us,
and that God is still accomplishing his gracious & saving purpose.

**Whatever our current situation or circumstance, including Covid,
our call is to live in trust and faithfully serve well
along whatever journey the Lord has laid out before us.**

**We are all, all of us, the blessed and beloved children of God,
each one uniquely equipped with potential for greatness and good...**

... but are we really living our lives defined by God's grace?

Do we proclaim Gospel joy & passion through this life we're living?,

**and am I gratefully embracing each day as a sign of God's grace?,
for the amazingly wonderful gift that life truly is?**

Truly whatever is going on in our life, our circumstances in life,
God can use it as **a classroom for us**, for our spiritual growth,
for it is where God calls us to serve according to his purpose.

Let me use the concept and practice of retirement in our culture
as an example and specific application of that important truth.

In the old days of family farms, older folks were highly valued,
for their insight, guidance, understanding and life experience
especially for all they knew about farming and growing crops.

They had lived through years of weather, soil and crop conditions
and they knew what worked and what had not worked in the past –
their '**lived knowledge**' was invaluable in raising crops.

But then attitudes changed as factories and manufacturing jobs
replaced agriculture as the industrial revolution progressed.
Older factory workers could not keep pace with the younger,
and viewed less usefully-functional, **they were devalued**.

Then after WW II, land developers and corporations
began to market 'retirement' as a life of leisure and rest,
in communities segregated by age to fill the years with fun,
as the appropriate reward for a lifetime of hard work.

And that attitude has been deadly, a tragic and wasteful mistake,
because idleness and self-absorption and disengagement
do not lead to satisfaction, contentment or happiness.

As it turns out, a self-indulgent, disconnected and idle retirement
is very destructive to our health and diminishes mental capability
for idle isolation is deadly and can render life meaningless.

We humans have an innate need to be busy, to feel useful & needed,
and fulfilling that, is critical to contentment and longevity.

**In addition, it's a waste of our God given talents, gifts & resources
that were intended for us to use, to serve and to help other people.**

And though we can't still do with vigor everything we once did,
that in no way means we cannot faithfully serve in some way,
or that we can't do anything that is useful and meaningful.
Anyone can send a note or card, make phone calls or offer a prayer,
visit with shut-ins to relieve their loneliness and isolation,
and offer healing support, encouragement and renewed hope.

In football,
teams are given a two minute warning in the final quarter
and they have pre-arranged strategy and run special plays
to make the best use, and score in the remaining time.

In basketball,
some of the best plays, fast breaks and most exciting action
will occur in the final minutes or even seconds of the game.
Now some teams will just run out the clock and coast,
but other teams make the most of whatever time they have.

**The question is,
how will each of us use well and faithfully the life we do have,
and where will we derive our life's meaning, contentment,
our lasting purpose, and reason for having lived at all?**

**Surely life is too precious to be wasted or rendered insignificant,
for surely God's grace makes more of difference in life than that...
... and surely we can do better than just run out the clock.**

We have just one shot at life, and we'll live today **only once**.
So let us not miss or ignore the purpose for which we are here,
**but let us fulfill the reason God gave us this day to live,
as a blessing in the lives of those we touch with God's love.**

Let us embrace this day and each day boldly and confidently
for the wonderful and precious gift that each day of life truly is,
for surely God intends for us today some delight and blessing,
some good reason and purpose for us to live out this day well.

To that end, I urge you to connect or reconnect by participating,
by finding ways that you can share in the mission of the Lord,
and let God's grace and Holy Spirit transform our lives,
by trusting in confidence, purpose & hope that God is good & gracious.

Our confidence and trust are well-placed in the Lord's promises.
Not in human achievement, human understanding or human success,
but rather we're to strive toward faithful and useful discipleship.

At the Lord's Table today, reflect on Paul's words, Philippians 3:12-14,

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, **because Christ Jesus has made me his own.** Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and **straining forward to what lies ahead,** I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.