

Pentecost 25B 14 November 2021  
Mark 13:1-8  
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth  
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*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 rumours 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 birth pangs. Let's pray:*

I remember the evening I broke down and howled inconsolably. I remember the moment my son received the phone call that would take him away to Canberra. And I remember a time not so long ago when my emotions were taken on a rollercoaster ride as I waited nervously for the results of a doctor's examination. These are just a few of the events that have torn down some of the great buildings of my life. Stones that I'd so carefully laid and built my life upon have crumbled and no longer stand one upon another. Temples of my world have fallen. My world has changed and my life is different.

We're all temple builders. Personalities, relationships, beliefs, institutions, roles, reputations, dreams and sometimes even illusions are our buildings. Stone upon stone we build them with the idea that these great structures will provide meaning, direction, identity, security, value, and order to our life and world. The temple in today's gospel is more than just a building in Jerusalem, more than a place of worship. It was the centre and firm foundation of Jewish life. It was where man met God. It provided identity, structure, and meaning just as our temples do today.

The disciples are awe struck with the impressive structures of the temple complex, much like tourists standing at the base of the Great Pyramids in Egypt or gaping up at the Eiffel Tower in Paris. They draw Jesus' attention to man's magnificent works, but rather than giving them a tour guide's spiel of dates, times, and names associated with such wonder, Jesus simply declares, "Take a photo because she's all coming down." I can imagine the raised eye brows and bemused expressions as the disciples struggle to process the gravity of Jesus' inconceivable assertion. Is it even possible for the foundation of Jewish faith, life, and culture, to be reduced to rubble?

What are your stories about the day your temple was destroyed? Maybe the death of a loved one brought the walls tumbling down; a story about cancer or dementia; the day you became a parent and caretaker to your own parent; the time someone betrayed and hurt you; the loss of a job, business or relationship; the realisation that your life or the life of one you love is controlled by addiction, fear, anger, or resentment. Or maybe it was the day you felt disempowered and that your life was out of your control. Beliefs that had sustained you for years suddenly crumble and become a rubble of doubts and questions.

Regardless of the situation, the day our temple falls is the day of apocalypse – a day when our great buildings fall and not one stone is left upon another. Our life and our world are changed forever. But when I say "apocalypse", I'm not suggesting the end of the world. Sure, it can certainly feel that way; earthquakes shake the foundations of our world, famine leaves us empty and starves us of satisfaction, wars divide and fragment the unity of human life and relationships, the many voices that tempt us make us restless – but it's not the end. Apocalypse is not so much about the end of the world as it is about the end of the many worlds, temples, and great buildings we have created for ourselves.

Our spiritual work in apocalyptic times is to remain calm, resist fear and temptation, to be faithful and not led astray, to be watchful, present, and attentive. Apocalypse, from the Greek: *Ἀποκάλυψις* [Apokalypsis] - means to reveal, to pull back, or to uncover (see Revelation 1:1 "The [Apokalypsis] *revelation* of Jesus Christ"). Apocalypse is much more about revelation than destruction.

The thing that goes hand in hand with true revelation is that there's always a peeling away of illusion. Most often, apocalypse exposes a truth and reality about our self, life, or world that we have denied, ignored, forgotten, or simply refused to see. It's always a painful process to see our great buildings fall and be confronted by the reality and truth revealed when the dust settles and we're laid bare and vulnerable.

The apocalypse of my Year 12 meltdown, forced me to take stock of my life and set me on a path of self-examination, personal growth, and the realisation that the world inside my head doesn't follow the rules of the outside world's portrayal of success. "Dad, I've just been offered the job in Canberra", made me face the fact that my son was no longer the little tacker I used to throw around in the surf and lure out with the promise of ice cream. He has become a fine young man more than capable of leading his own life and making his own decisions. And my emotional rollercoaster ride in the doctor's office crashed any illusions I may have had left about the robustness of life.

When the great buildings begin to shake, the temptation is to shore up the foundation with more concrete and steel; make them stronger. The tradie in me sees the sense in that, but Jesus says that it's all unnecessary. It won't work. Jesus sees what we're not able to see. When our great buildings begin to shake, we feel vulnerable, isolated, like we've been abandoned even by God. Yet, the truth is, seeing what he can see, Jesus jumps into the fray of our apocalypse reminding us that this isn't the end; rather, the beginning of new birth.

Like our little brother, Flynn, today is about new beginnings. Jesus has jumped into the fray of his apocalypse and made Flynn a newly minted, marked, and redeemed creation. Baptism releases Satan's grip, drowns the old, sinful nature, throws down the stones of human construction, and reveals God's original and intentional plan from the beginning to create humankind in his image and bless it. Jesus has given Flynn new, real, heaven-bound, Book of Life, eternal, life. Jesus has torn down the stones of your temples and rebuilt you, likewise.

Too often our temples are built on some form of illusion. Apocalyptic days crop up, forcing us to decide between reality and illusion, life and death. They force us to confront the hard questions about where we put our trust. The day our great buildings fall, is the day God makes us face our weakness, corruptibility and instability, in order to remind us that true strength, incorruptibility and permanence, belong only to God. We face our temporal nature in order to discover God's eternal nature. We must all suffer our wilderness experiences, be emptied, have our stones thrown down, before we can know the joys of the birth pangs and be rebuilt, renewed in God's image.

In today's gospel, Jesus announces the apocalypse but he doesn't leave us a nice summary or a tidy take away of his teaching. Rather, he tells us that the great buildings will and need to fall. Which leaves us with more questions than answers. Much like a topic Graham Rouse and I are wrestling with at the moment. While there are no easy answers, there are many questions to ponder. So, here's a few to stir up the ol' grey matter:

- What are the temples of your life that need to fall?
- What truth and reality do you most need to face?
- How might God be working a new birth in you?

Tough and poignant realities to face, but I always want you to remember this: You're not alone in facing the challenges these questions pose. Jesus' last promise to his disciples on the mountain in Galilee before he ascended to the Father's right hand was, "lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20 NKJV). And though today is but the beginning of the birth pangs, come what may, Jesus' promise to you today is that he will stay by your side, every step of the way, even to the end of the age. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.