

Remembrance Sunday 2021 Mark 13 v1-8 SJB 9-30 SSC 11.30

I don't know about you, but I found today's Gospel reading a bit too close for comfort. As always, this time of year forces us to confront the dreadful waste of life exacted by wars, and rightly, to express our immense gratitude for those whose sacrifice has bought us our present freedom. Not only that, but in these current troubled times we also live under the shadow of pandemic and the ominous threat to life itself of climate change on our beautiful mother earth. Prophecies about future wars and natural disasters are writ large at this point in our journey through Mark's gospel.

As our reading opens, Jesus and his disciples are just leaving the great temple, built by King Solomon, that's been at the very centre of their Jewish faith for centuries. For them it's the place where they believe God actually dwells and the seat of all power and authority. It was once destroyed and the people sent into exile, but now it's back in business and even more glorious than before, rebuilt by Herod, no less, for his own devious political ends. The Jewish religious authorities hold to the dangerous illusion that they are in control. They keep the religious laws to the letter but...it's really all about power and money. Loving God and neighbour...the very heart of the law...has been utterly lost. An awful warning to any religious institution...or indeed any institution claiming the moral high ground. Church and parliament, beware!

In the chapters leading up to today's passage Mark has recorded how Jesus has shocked the temple authorities to the core by violently driving out the money changers and sacrificial animal sellers and railing against them- -how they have challenged him to say by whose authority he is doing these things and how he has countered that by asking them whether John's baptism was from God or from man. They can't answer him and so he refuses to answer them. Since then he's been teaching boldly in the temple, telling parables that these religious leaders understand only too well are getting at them. He's even accused them outright of hypocrisy and abuse of the poor...and now he prophesies total destruction of the temple...a prophecy that comes true less than forty years later.

If you ever go to the Holyland, don't miss seeing the huge amazing magnificent model of Herod's great temple and its precincts as it was at the time of Jesus...and then visit all that's left of the temple today. Since its destruction nearly two thousand years ago by the Romans in ad.70 all that remains is part of a wall.known today as the wailing wall. It's still a place of pilgrimage. and its stones are still truly enormous, but it's not even a wall of the main temple building. It's just a remnant of the outer precincts. Nowadays it's surrounded by Israeli soldiers. You have to go through very strict security to get anywhere near to it, but pilgrims still flock there to pray.

As they're leaving the temple the disciples begin exclaiming about its magnificence. I wonder why. Are they embarrassed? Worried about the possible consequences of Jesus's anger, his fire and brimstone preaching? Are they trying to tone things down a bit.? Jesus's reaction- - Words full of doom- -must have startled them: "Not one stone will be left upon another," he proclaims, "All will be thrown down!" What? This magnificent temple of God be thrown down?

Jesus then retires to the Mount of Olives opposite the temple and four of his closest disciples come to him privately asking anxious questions. They've been with him for three years.

They've seen and heard the most wonderful things. They clearly don't actually doubt him..but being only human they want some clarity. When will this be? How will we know? What signs can you give us?

Does Jesus give them the certainty they crave? No, he most definitely does not. These are fearful prophecies and warnings. Earthquakes, famines, wars, persecutions and utter confusion will continue and increase. Well, that's certainly proved to be the case. For two thousand years these horrors have all continued and increased and are still increasing. The whole human race has much to answer for. We don't know when it will all end...maybe we wish we did.

But strangely, Jesus calls these terrible happenings, "birthpangs". Those of us blessed with having given birth will know all about birth pangs...excruciatingly painful...but the joy of new birth is overwhelming and the memory of the agony soon recedes. If that were not so, I doubt that anyone would ever have been willing to go through it more than once and the human race would have died out long ago!

Yes, this strange image of birth pangs is about hope...hope of new life after anguish...new life in spite of everything that goes wrong...new life out of all the pain and suffering in our world. It won't be long before the disciples see this demonstrated by Jesus before their very eyes. After all the horror and terror of his arrest, sham trial, agonising crucifixion and burial...when their faith's in tatters and they run away and hide...after all this, Jesus is raised...raised to new life...in the greatest sign there has ever been...and now, two, thousand years later...because of that little band of believers who saw, believed, obeyed and spread the word...we can have a share in that new life in Christ...both now and in the life beyond the grave.

We believe that by his death and resurrection Christ has already broken the power of evil. Even though it may still appear to have our world all too firmly in its grip, these final struggles will one day be clearly shown to have been the birth pangs of the final consummation of all things under God. So, let's never waste our time regretting the past or worrying about the future. Let's simply get on in hope and trust with loving and serving God as we remember and give thanks for those who have given their lives that we might live in peace and freedom,

as we work to care for this world with all the enormity of what changes that may bring for our lifestyle today,

as we share and live out the good news with our families and our neighbours that because of the resurrection we have a hope based on solid ground.

Yes, we **can** risk surrendering our lives to God,.we **can** risk living in his light and grace and love here and now....**it all makes perfect sense.**

No, we're not likely to escape suffering...but nothing, not even death itself, can ultimately destroy us.

For Alleluia, Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Carole Lewis, Remembrance Sunday 2021.