

The beginning...of the end
Mark 13:1-8

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

The notice has been given. The chain linked fence is up. The no trespassing signs are posted. I have even heard that a certificate of demolition has been approved. Now we are just waiting to find out when it will happen. When the walls and the roof will be crushed down. When the bricks will be smashed apart. When will the last of the entire structure be laid waste to and disappear forever from the town of Hanover. For those of you who know what I am talking about, I am sure this news is sad, depressing or maybe just shocking. The last of the Old St. Mark structure down on Carlisle Street – the Sunday school building - will be demolished and made into a royal crown convenience store probably within the next year or so.

This is a building that some of you remember fondly, where you went to Sunday school, summer Bible school, where you got ready for your wedding in the sanctuary that is already been demolished. Some of you might have been baptized there, confirmed there, or even remember funerals of parents or grandparents there. That church building, that can only be seen in old pictures now like the painting in the parlor, holds a fondness to many of you, as place forever in your heart. And the sad news to hear is that soon, very soon, the last of the remnant of the church will be gone forever.

But we have good news because for fifty years we have been here on Charles street. We have a good building here, Beautiful sanctuary, stately stone, ample room for our Sunday school classes and counseling and preschool and scouts. Okay yes we have our problems but we are working on them. We are worried about the slate roof that seems to be holding up for now. The humongous boiler is always a worry but it kicked over for another winter so far. The new organ console has begun being built that will give renewed life to our organ for many more years to come. Overall we have a really nice sanctuary and Sunday school building here.

But even this we know will not last. The roof will eventually need replacement, the boiler will need replacement, the organ even a new console will still need other improvements and work to keep it running well. This building and church as wonderful as it is, we know will not last. That is troubling to think about, it causes us sorrow and even pain perhaps to think about this building this land being torn down one day and becoming a parking lot for the hospital, a new office building or perhaps even another convenience store.

That's probably how the disciples felt in our Gospel reading today. The disciples were admiring and pointing out the large stones and the grandeur of the building. And Jesus tells that

“Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” This is there temple. The great seat of Jewish worship. The center of Jewish heritage and pride. And Jesus says, “everything will be thrown down.” That must have been disturbing, and heart wrenching for a good Jewish person, even disciples of Jesus to hear. This was their place of worship, their holy place, their national pride, their sense of worth and history, and Jesus says not one stone will remain. All will be torn down.

While we are attached to our buildings, imagine how tied the Jewish faith was to the temple of Jerusalem. In the tenth century B.C., almost one thousand years before Christ, King Solomon was given the task by God to build the temple in Jerusalem the capital of David’s kingdom. Solomon built the temple just as God described it in the History books of 1 Kings And Chronicles. It would have been a rectangular building set high on the temple mount. Stones were carefully cut to fit perfectly together before ever even reaching the building site, so as to show the perfection of the temple. And we are talking large stones, some easily over 12 feet long, six feet high and four feet wide. For the day, it was an impressive architectural structure over 110 feet long, 40 feet wide and with the main room being 55 feet high. Some other sources say the highest point at the temple could have easily been 207 feet high - 20 stories high. The hospital across the street is only 4 stories high but you can see it from all around town. Imagine the impressive size that the temple must have been. For five hundred years this temple was the center of Jewish worship.

In 586 the Babylonians laid waste to Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. But within 70 years of its destruction, the Israelites returned rebuilding the temple and once again establishing the heart of the Jewish people. Over the years the Temple had gone through many repairs and changes. In the time of Jesus, Herod had been spending lots of time and resources to renovate the temple, trying to impress others and rival the Greek and Roman Temples of the empire. So Herod once again brought in gold inlays, covering the walls in gold, and rebuilding columns that surrounded the entire structure. All Jews hoped to worship there and be in the shadow of the great temple of Jerusalem, it even became a Benediction at the Passover, everyone around the table would end the service with “Next year in Jerusalem”. It was a place of holiness, of pride, of power, and prestige. It was their heart of worship.

But will it last? According to Mark, Jesus prophesies that the temple will not stand, it will be destroyed. Destruction will come, wars will come, nations will rise against nation, earthquakes and famines will come, and this is only the beginning. And by the time Mark is writing these prophetic words of Jesus some of this very much would have come to pass. In 66 A.D. the Jewish people rebelled against Roman rule and four years later the Roman legions had marched through Israel and destroyed most of Jerusalem including the temple. On top of that there was in fact a major

earthquake in that region that very same year. So when Mark is writing his Gospel, these words of Jesus are fresh in the minds of the hearers because these are the very things they are dealing with at that moment.

And the word that Mark gives us from Jesus is that this is but the beginning. Mark 13 is entirely an apocalyptic message for the hearers that are going through the turmoil of war. They are feeling the pain of lose of homes, businesses, families, and yes even the temple. How do you keep faith if these things are happening. And the message is do not be lead astray, these things will happen. But God is in charge. Like most all apocalyptic literature from Daniel to Revelation, the message of Mark 13 is clear, these things will come, but God is still in charge. Jesus even goes on in the next few verses after our readings to predict the struggles that the faithful will go through. That they are going through in the times of Mark. And yes that we still are going through even in this time and place. The battle still rages even today, false teachings and apathy abound, hatred and misunderstanding still divide. Wars and disease still kill. Faith is denounced as dead, a pre-21st century idea, ridiculed and maligned. Yes to keep the faith is not easy sometimes. Yes it demands sacrifice, true belief is not easy, but requires people to be active in their prayer life, in their worship life, study of scriptures, in fellowship and outreach and fulfilling the call of God to share the message with others. It is not easy.

By verse 13 we hear the promise that the one who endures to the end will be saved. Endure. Keep to the faith. Stay in the word. Things will change, there will be nations against nation, brother against brother, family against family. Communities will be built and leveled. Church buildings will come and go. But God is eternal and promises that when all this passes away, today, tomorrow, next year, in fifty years, two thousand years, whenever that last moment comes, the things of this world will not matter, the greatest buildings, largest structures, greatest wealth, will end and be no more, but God will save you and gives you a place in that eternal kingdom forever. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, we come before you humbled and fallen, living in a world of despair and decay, where there is death and sorrow, disease and persecutions. We turn to you our only rock that will never be destroyed. We turn to you our foundation and everlasting hope that has no end. We give thanks for this great gift of your eternal promise. May you lift us up this day in that spirit.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

Almighty Everlasting Father we remember before you this day all those who are separated from your love and the love of family and friends. We know of many who have built walls that have separated them from your glory. Tear down those walls of this world, to free us to come to you and receive your glory and forgiveness. Over come all hatred and human failings and bring all people into your Word. Lead us all to your grace and help us to walk on the path of understanding, forgiveness, and peace. May we be filled with your spirit and guide us in being your witnesses connected to your everlasting grace.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

God, stretch out your saving hand to those who are sick. With your strong love, comfort the lonely, the oppressed, and all who suffer. Give healing to those who are afflicted. Give peace to those troubled both physically and mentally. Impart your Holy Comforter to be with them in their times of need. Especially we remember today our shut-ins and Howell Crawford... The family of Gladys Garrett.... Brian Livelsburger.... Lisa Glass and her family and all those we lift up in our prayers to you now...

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for this community of faithful; teach us to use the many gifts you have given us for the common good. Empower us to sing your praise on earth and lead others to find your love. Take us with all your children through this life until we join the angels and saints in heaven. Bless the people gathered here at St. Paul continue to send us out renewed and filled with your mission to our community and beyond.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, o Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.