

Where is the Good News?
November 15, 2009
Mark 13:1 – 8

In preparing for this Sunday's sermon, I read many articles about our lectionary reading from Mark 13. As you can probably gauge from the reading today, this passage is a difficult one and vastly different than what we have been accustomed to over the past several weeks as we have followed Jesus and his disciples throughout Mark's account of their Ministry. If I had to guess, I would say that very few pastors or church leaders have ever turned to this passage and had an immediate reaction of excitement. Those of us who follow the lectionary do so not only to, as in the words of our own Reverend Carlene, keep us honest, but we do so also as a means to give account of the teachings of Jesus in accordance to what our Church forefathers believed to be important. In following the lectionary we challenge ourselves to bring God's Word into a modern world through a sense of unbiased, historical order void of personal agenda. Please don't misunderstand me, I do not discount those who do not follow the lectionary, in fact, I often envy their ability to search through God's Word and pull together their own series of messages that are meaningful for their congregations, but for an untested Pastor like myself, I find the lectionary keeps me from teaching only my favorite passages over and over again; forcing me to take the time to look at the more difficult teachings found in God's Word. And so we find ourselves knee deep this morning in one of those difficult teachings.

In reading Mark 13:1 – 8, I found myself flipping back to the other lectionary readings to see what the other possible texts were for this morning. I wasn't excited about this passage. Where is the good news? This is the gospel according to Mark and gospels are supposed to be filled with good news, hope, encouragement; filled with miracles and teachings of love and social justice. Here, instead, we find a passage filled with the destruction of holy buildings, wars, earthquakes and famines. Where is the good news?

Chapter 13 of Mark's gospel (cf. Matt 24 and Luke 21) takes place during the final week of Christ's life. Jesus has been baptized by John in the Jordan, has called a group of disciples, healed a number of people, and managed to infuriate the religious authorities. He has taught in parables, fed over 5,000 with the lunch of one little boy, and we have witnessed him calming stormy seas. Now, as Jesus ministry begins to slowly wind to an end, we find he and his disciples have reached Jerusalem. It is here that Jesus' social justice campaign climaxes as he angers the temple officials by driving out the money changers, criticizes the scribes who have overlooked their duties and instead have focused their attention on their own positions of power and stature, and Jesus chastises those who would take the widow's mite for their own purposes instead of using it for God's glory. ([Fair 2006](#)) The events that have played out in Jerusalem in conjunction with the dark words of our scripture text serves to transition us from what we know about Jesus ministry to the reality of what is to come; it points to the Passion of Christ that will be endured in the days to come. A sense of urgency has begun to form on Jesus' every action and word. As Jesus is leaving the temple for the final time, one of his disciples becomes awestruck by the size of the stones being used for temple construction and with childlike innocence, the disciple says to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

In recent years we have found ourselves in a world of over-consumption and worship of material wealth. Our society has grown to measure a person's worth by the size of their homes, the cars that they drive, the label on their clothing and the neatness of their appearance. How then can we find fault with Jesus' disciples? The amazement that the disciples experienced at the temple is not unlike our own amazement with what is bigger, faster and more flamboyant in our world today. The disciples in all their innocence have found themselves, like us, focused on an outward display of strength and power. Jesus, however, is not concerned with bricks and mortar. Rather, he is disturbed by the misrepresentation of what is godly.

During our yard sale a few weeks ago, many of those who stopped by to rummage asked the question, “so where is your church?” Of course, it was tempting for us to redirect their focus on our building, reassuring them that the house they stood in front of was our church. But in hind sight I have to say that we, too, had our attention and focused misaligned. In a society that looks for the material symbols of power and strength and focuses on the outward appearance of what is godly, we have failed in recalling that this building is not our church, but it is the people within it that make up our community of faith. Community is not about location, it is about the people. Each Sunday we do not bring 20 to 30 people into this temple, but rather we bring 20 to 30 temples into this location. If all of this was gone tomorrow and we were forced to meet in a new location or in several different locations from week to week, then our community of faith would still carry on. God’s call would still be upon each of our lives and our responsibility to bring the Kingdom of God to all those we encounter would be the same.

Jesus sees past the flashy pretense of the faith of religious leaders, physical buildings and legalism in the church today to the very heart of God’s people. He prophesied the temple’s destruction – the downfall of the center of Jewish worship, life and religious heritage – and he did so seemingly without emotion. Despite the best efforts of numerous prophets down through the ages, like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos (Isa 13, Jer 7, Amos 8), God’s covenant people have drifted away from the way of truth to the worship of false gods; idols found in the form of buildings, material wealth, power and prestige. ([Fair 2006](#))

And yet Jesus speaks with lots of emotion when he speaks of God’s people and the promise of a new covenant with God’s people; one that Jesus had been sent to establish. As Jesus broke the bread and served the wine to the disciples in the upper room, he did so with great emotion; with love and compassion for those he had chosen to carry on in his absence. This is my body, broken for you, not broken physically but broken spiritually and emotionally. In as much as you do this do so in remembrance of me. In remembrance of what he tried to do during their ministry together. Jesus

didn't have to die and he most certainly did not have to die a criminal's death. Jesus came to reconcile relationship between God and God's creation. Jesus came with a message of radical inclusivity and it was the message that got him killed. As he hung upon the cross he showed great emotion once again for God's people, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." In all of his pain and suffering, Jesus never forgot about God's people and the message of love and inclusion he was sent to bring into this world.

Jesus tells the disciples not to worry or be alarmed when they hear of wars and rumors of wars. That's life; those things happen, he says, as does famine, earthquakes, uprising of nation against nations and kingdom against kingdom. In the twinkling of an eye all of these things we take for granted can be gone; but we need not be afraid, for these things are not signs of death, but signs of life. ([Cain, 2004](#)) And so I ask you once again this morning, where is the good news? In all of the destruction, corruption and disillusion we face not only in our scripture reading today but also in our world today, where is the good news?

The good news is found in this, "these are the beginnings of birth pains." This world and all that we find within it, wars and rumors of wars, economic downturn and hardship, we are in a time of renewal; a forging process that leads to life – life eternal. Christianity, relationship with our Creator, our Redeemer and our Sustainer encourages loves, reconciliation and community with God's people as a means to an end, not an end to our means. Yes, we will endure hardship in this life, but we must look beyond the immediate, beyond the temple construction and beyond the joys of this world towards the bigger picture; life eternal. Our level of thankfulness cannot be dependent on what things or how many things we have in order to be happy. ([Cain, 2004](#)) Rather, we are to be dependent on the promises of God and the New Covenant God has offered us through Christ Jesus.

In less than a couple of weeks we will be celebrating Thanksgiving; a time for us to celebrate and remember not the Hallmark moments offered to us through Publix commercials and Norman Rockwell

paintings, but rather a time when our forefathers offered gratitude not for something, but in something. Half of their numbers were dead and they were strangers in a strange land; far away from their homes, their material wealth and without modern luxury. And still there was thanksgiving to God; thanksgiving for an opportunity to start a new, to wipe their slate clean and to focus on their community and relationship with their God.

Fleming Rutledge, Pastor of Grace Episcopal in New York City, once wrote that “the Bible teaches us that the life of thankfulness is the proper way for human beings to be related to God . . . the most important thanksgiving of all, the one that transcends all human contingencies, is thanking and praising God for being God.” It is my prayer today that each of you are blessed and encouraged during the upcoming holiday season, as well as in all the days to come, with the good news that, God is God and that “God’s promise and love shall be with us when all else is gone and when time itself shall be no more.” ([Cain, 2004](#)) Amen.