

Mark 13: 1-13

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' ²Then Jesus asked him, 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.'

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?' ⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. ⁷When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸For 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.

⁹ 'As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. ¹⁰And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹²Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ¹³and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Meditation: In this chapter we enter a different world in terms of Jesus' discourse. We begin with a prediction of the destruction of the temple. Was Jesus referring to the future Roman revenge on intransigent Israel (which came to a finale in 70 AD, just 40 years after Jesus' death/resurrection)? Was he pointing to the destruction of the temple as the inevitable result of rebellion against God as Jesus was revealing and incarnating God? Or did Jesus believe he had a role to play in these events? We are not told.

But when his disciples ask for more details, the discourse shifts to more cosmic descriptions of the end. Things will get difficult and desperate for people. False prophets will arise and take advantage of people's desperation by leading them astray. Wars will escalate in frequency and intensity. Natural disasters will multiply. For followers of Jesus there will be an added difficulty: persecution by religious and political authorities hostile to the gospel. Even families will be torn apart over their allegiance to Christ. But believers are called to stay alert, focused on Christ and patient in their affliction.

The literary genre of this discourse is called 'apocalyptic.' We find it in the later parts of the Old Testament in prophetic books like Daniel. Cataclysmic events, natural disasters and cosmic doom are ways of describing one's world exploding. Whether someone is witnessing what we're witnessing today between a global pandemic and massive protests on the streets, which only amplify our global problems at this time, or

whether one's world is imploding as they face a fatal disease have its way, the difficult dying of a loved one, or one's mental health falling apart... apocalyptic is one way to creatively express 'the end of the world.'

But Jesus' message is intended for those who seek to follow him to the end. How will his love for them and their love for each other live itself out in difficult times, especially when this difficulty is directed at them for being who they are? It is time for them to stand up and be counted and trust where their faith will take them.

In this time of terrible injustice for black people and a virus that is attacking the poorest and most vulnerable the worst, how do we embody Jesus' love as his followers? How do we engage the fact that such events expose systemic and historic injustices that need to be engaged persistently until change happens? We can only do our part, but our part matters in one on one relationships, specific actions, some listening, learning and talking, the issues that will influence the direction of our voting... Persistent love always finds some way to express itself where people can feel it's warmth supporting them... Jesus continues to call on his disciples today. Do we count ourselves in that group?

Prayer: In this time that can feel both overwhelming, O God, and difficult to be motivated, fill us with renewal of passion and purpose, to be your children in spirit and in truth. Fill us with a desire to listen and learn, to understand and engage. Open doors for us in terms of opportunities that are all around us. May we know your hope and may we discover new faith that good things can come when our hearts are stirred... Amen.