

Daniel 12:1-3

Mark 13:1-8

Hebrews 10:11-14

“Our hearts are glad and
our spirit rejoices.” AMEN!

Today is not the last Sunday of the Church year,
but today is the last Sunday that we hear
the Gospel of Mark in worship for a while.

Knowing this means that we want
to recognize all that Mark has
given us since last Advent.

In Mark, Jesus immediately moves
from place to place preaching,
performing miracles, debating with critics,
and moving towards Jerusalem.

There he will come to clash with both
the civil and the religious authorities that want
to silence him at any cost.

If you remember, the gospel begins
with a bang as Mark revealed
his witness with

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ,
the Son of God.”

That is how the gospel opens,

and then reports on the baptism of Jesus
by John in the wilderness where the
Holy Spirit shot into Jesus and drove
him into the wilderness to go
toe to toe with Satan.

It is clear in Mark that Jesus' adversaries
are of this world and of the spiritual world.

For me, Mark's gospel is like
watching a tennis match.

Spectators hardly move their
bodies at tennis matches, but their heads
follow the ball back and forth.

As we "spectate" Jesus in Mark
we move from looking at the Son of God
to whatever/whoever the adversary
happens to be on the way. (Pause)

Mark 13:1-8 reveals one of these
back and forth images.

This one is Jesus with his disciples.

In these exchanges Jesus responds to the disciples
by taking the conversation in different directions.

Our witness today begins with them marveling
at the stones of the temple.

Jesus responded that none of them will be
left stacked; all will be cast down.

When a few of them ask Jesus
when that will happen, Jesus counters
that they needed to be cautious that
no one leads them astray.

And then he launched into the varieties of
chaos events that Mark's audience
was already encountering.

Whispers of war and signals that the end
was near as nations battled nations and
kingdoms fought kingdoms;
earthquakes and famines abound.

The final verse Jesus revealed that
“this is just the beginning of the birth pangs.”

Mark's gospel began with a bang and
this final Sunday of year B reveals that Mark,
even here, ends with a bang, too. (Pause)

When I think of the metaphorical
tennis matches of our day
I think of the debates that exist

between COVID vaccines,
global climate change, and
racial discrimination.

The back and forth arguing.

No one listens to the other because minds
are made up and facts are debunked
while experts are blamed and
everything's just a conspiracy anyway.

It is enough to make the sensible throw up
their hands and say, "What's the point of trying
to even talk to people anymore?" (Pause)

A congregation once began to reach out
to people that they hadn't seen in
church for a while.

They formed groups of two and went
down the directory list.

There was one name no one recognized, but
he was on the list so they went to
knock on his door.

When they turned the corner they found
the man's home at the end of the street.

The yard was overgrown and unkept.

It took a while for the two visitors to navigate
the walkway up to the front door.

The curtains were drawn and they thought
perhaps the house was vacant.

Jack moved his hand to knock on the door
when just then it flew open,

“What do you want?!”
The thin man with silver hair asked.

“Hi, are y-you, M-Mr. Tarnower?”

“Yeah, who are you?” He shot back.

“We are from the church and we
wanted to stop by and see you.”

Reluctantly Tarnower invited them inside
and the two quickly explained why they
were visiting.

After they spoke for a minute Mr. Tarnower
shook his bony finger at them and said,

“I’ll tell you why I don’t go to any church anymore.

It's because I got into the habit of reading
the newspaper before I went to church.”

Esther, the other volunteer, leaned forward
and asked why reading the newspaper kept
him from coming to church?

Mr. Tarnower replied, “It's not because of
the comics or the sports page.

It is the news and the reports about
how awful it is out there!

There's disease, war, violence, famine and mistrust.

Families are falling apart,
walls are being built while things
that need repair get ignored.

Children are homeless and
everyone is buying a gun!

I stopped coming to church because
everything is falling apart and the church
cant' do anything about it.”

Jack and Esther didn't know what to say.

They reported that their new pastor was pretty nice,
that their choir was really getting better,
and that there's this new Wednesday
night program he might want to try...

But, Mr. Tarnower just shook his head,
“No, I don't think so. I go out for groceries
and that's about all I can face.

I went to church for a while but
the world didn't change.

It has even gotten worse!

Then my wife died and I decided to sit here
and wait for my turn to come.

I don't go to church - because the church -
has nothing to say.” (Pause)

Now, we can poke at the flaws in
Mr. Tarnower's argument and decision
but he also has a point.

What does the church have to say
about the crumbling world?

Is the church staying silent due to fear of retaliation?

Are we complacent to just spectate,
while our bodies and mouths no longer
move or speak?

If we are then let Mr. Tarnower's words
be heard again, "I quit going to church
because the church has nothing to say."

See, the actions we perform and the words
we proclaim must remain true to the
word of the gospel.

If they do, remain true to the calling of
Christ Jesus then the church has something to say
and some people are gonna get pissed off.

Jesus' hometown folk were excited
to see him at first but after an
hour of preaching they were carrying him
up to the top of a cliff to throw him over it.

Jesus knew the message of grace that
he brought was going to get him in trouble.

Yet, he could not keep silent as
the world crumbled around him. (Pause)

On this final day in Mark's gospel we are reminded
that this gospel was not meant to give us

comfort nor was it written to make us
feel safe.

Staying true to the gospel of
Jesus is a dangerous job, but it is not
as dangerous as staying silent.

It is not as dangerous as doing nothing in
the response to injustice. (Pause)

It is ironic that we will be spending the next
few weeks worshipping in this space
while our sanctuary undergoes necessary
repairs to the truss system and
other needed renovations.

I look forward to being back inside that space
with as many of you here and out there
that can come.

I hope that we go inside and
“ooh and ahh” a bit, too.

Yet, also remember that this is all temporary
and that one day “not one stone will be left
here upon another; one day it will all
be thrown down.”

Jesus had something to say to those disciples

that marveled at the works of human hands.

“You’re in awe of such a massive temple, are you?
One day it will all come crumbling down.”

Mark’s year B comes to a conclusion with a bang.

The church can be accused of being silent,
but not Jesus.

Not then and not now because
one of the ways Jesus speaks today is
through each one of you.

In your words and in your actions,
Jesus still speaks.

Whether we are in here, over there or outside of
this holy space we are called to be brave
and to resist the false comforts of
staying silent.

That’s what we do here, create space
to be brave and to community with God.

Like in Hebrews, we read “consider how
to provoke one another
to love and good deeds... not neglecting
to meet together, but encouraging

one another.”

Have you ever thought about what it means
to provoke someone to love and good deeds?

It means we cannot be silent even when
death scares the daylights out of us.

Even when the world looks like it's on
the fast track to destruction... we proclaim
the gospel of Christ because we
have something important to say
and loving justice to do. (Pause)

Say it, do it, feel it... after all, according
to Mark the day of judgment
has already occurred.

It was the day when Jesus was raised up on
the cross taking the punishment we deserved.

People committed the sins... we still do...
but Jesus took the punishment.

One week before Christ the King Sunday and
then the next week after that is the start of
the new church year.

We close the gospel of Mark for now

but carry on its message.

Something or someone wants us to keep silent
while the world goes to hell in a hand basket,
but we know now this gospel
that must be proclaimed and
silence is not an option.

AMEN!