

Daniel 12:1-3

Mark 13:1-8

Hebrews 10:11-18, 19-25

“You show us the path of life,  
and in your presence  
there is fullness of joy.” AMEN!

Our church, like many others,  
have an altar guild.

This is the committee of people  
who change the necessary paraments for worship,  
prepare the communion table, and  
organize people to perform  
important parts of the service.

Can you imagine being on the altar guild  
in early biblical times?

Picture this...

In Leviticus there are a number of details  
specified on how to perform the various sacrifices  
that were done for worship and  
for the forgiveness of sins.

A bull needed to be slaughtered.

An act done at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

A cup of the bull's blood was brought

to the entrance where the priest would  
dip his finger in the blood and  
sprinkle some of the blood  
seven times, before the LORD,  
in front of the  
curtain of the sanctuary.

The priest would then put some of  
the blood on the horns of the altar and  
the rest he shall pour out at the base of  
the altar as a burn offering.

Imagine trying to get people to join  
altar guild back then!

This is the point that is made in  
the Hebrew reading where it said,

“And every priest stands day after day at his service,  
offering again and again the same sacrifices  
that can never take away sin.” (Pause)

Thankfully we don't need to contend with doing  
those things anymore for worship.

We can “AMEN” that!

But, think of the work of  
the temple in Jesus' day,

especially in festival times when  
the multitudes of people traveled  
to Jerusalem to come to the temple  
with their sacrifices.

As gross as it sounds, it must have been like  
working in a meat processing plant.

Live animals go in and finished product comes out.  
(Pause)

I recall our boys having to watch  
the details of what happens in these  
processing plants for their health class.

They'd witness facilities that  
keep chickens or turkeys in  
their various stages of development.

Certain days of the week were  
slaughter days.

Large facilities could gather, stun, kill,  
de-feather, butcher, and prepare  
750,000 turkeys a week for distribution.

Conveyor belts carry the birds from one step  
to the next with workers performing  
their duties in the process.

I remember them, with this real knowledge,  
losing their taste for poultry.

It's a messy experience to know  
where our meat comes from.

Yet, so many don't choose to learn. (Pause)

Now, I don't mean to turn you off  
in your preparations for Thanksgiving, but  
this is the wisdom we need to have in order to,  
as Daniel wrote,

“shine like stars and lead many to righteousness.”

We need to know how the sausage is made.

It's not for the faint of heart.

Knowledge, wisdom, following Jesus is  
going to open our eyes and  
lead us to actions that are necessary. (Pause)

As we dive into Mark's gospel today,  
we find Jesus coming out of the temple.

It was the “processing plant” I just talked about.

Animals going in and meat coming out,  
money changing hands.

All said to be done in the name of God.

Knowing that, and knowing that  
today's reading follows last week's warning  
from Jesus to

“beware of the scribes who wear long robes  
and want respect in the marketplace, and  
the best seats at the synagogues and  
the places of honor at banquets.”

Then the poor woman, remember,  
a widow entered and gave her last  
two coins to the temple,  
it was all she had left to live on.

The temple leaders devoured her home.

We now enter our reading for today.

The disciples marvel over the huge stones  
and large buildings that made up the temple.

We still do the same things.

Think of the marvelous structures on Thomasville Rd.

Perhaps we marvel at our space.

Jesus reminds us it'll all be thrown down one day.

What then?

Well, we'd better have the knowledge,  
the wisdom, to be sure we are following  
Jesus so that we won't be led astray  
from doing the things that are necessary.

(Pause)

To know what is necessary we  
turn back to Hebrews,  
and we find the text is not so much  
a letter written to a congregation as

it is a sermon preached to a community of  
Jesus followers that have forgotten their  
purpose and neglected the wisdom  
they'd received.

The writer called for a threefold  
lesson of necessity and a  
teaching of perseverance in faith  
because of what Jesus had done.

First, approach the sanctuary with a true heart,

full of assurance that Jesus has made  
the final sacrifice.

His spilled blood means that no longer does  
the temple (or any place of worship)  
have to slaughter animals.

Second, the writer urged the listener to hold fast  
to the confession of our hope.

This hope is that Christ has promised to be faithful.

Jesus fulfilled his mission and now acts  
as our priest and intermediary.

This hope takes courage, however,  
for it is risky business to be faithful and to love,  
for we live in a world where people  
do awful things.

No one needs to look far to know this truth. (Pause)  
These apocalyptic texts make us wonder  
how God will unveil things before our eyes.

How will many be led astray?

Perhaps you recall during Covid and  
the roll-out of vaccines.

Many said it was a sign of the anti-Christ  
to receive a vaccine.

These days the other side says the  
sign of the anti-Christ is said to be on  
the forehead of those who wear a MAGA hat.  
(Pause)

Let us be wise to see through  
such provocations.

They are meant to violence.

Both are absurd and meant to divide us. (Pause)

The third urging in the Hebrews sermon is  
to “consider how we can provoke one another  
to love and good deeds,  
not neglecting to meet together.”

You are perhaps like me imagining  
some very dark times approaching.

People I care about are being threatened.

I know it is the same for you.

Let me assure you, none of this is new,  
and one of the worst things we can do



is separate from one another.

The urge is to run away or seclude ourselves,  
but that's what the liars and deceivers want.

Jesus said, "Many will come in my name and say,  
"I am he! And they will lead many astray."

Jesus goes on to say, "Don't be alarmed,  
this must take place, but it will not be the end,  
it's the beginning of birth pangs." (Pause)

And birthing is dangerous.

Our task, then, is to keep our hearts true;  
hold fast to the hope Jesus gives; and  
provoke one another with  
love and good deeds.

We are not the first to experience times like these,  
but we are prepared, and not alone;

God is still with us.

God will give us the words we need to say.

AMEN!