

Sermon for November 17, 2024
26th Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 28B
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Daniel 12:1-3
Psalm 16
Hebrews 10:11-14 (15-18) 19-25
Mark 13:1-8

The Collect for the today cautions us:

"Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life..."

And the Gospel cautioned us as well. Jesus walks out of the temple with his disciples who notice the structure of the Temple.

"Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

The stones they were looking at were not the size of chairs or tables, but the size of walls. These were huge stones. I was driving into southern New Mexico recently and my path took me through one of the wind farms generating electricity. They look big, but it was not until I was driving back and was passed by semis carrying oversized loads that their true size hit me. The blades were as long as the entire semi-rig and trailer. The generator was the size of a mobile home. Massive.

This is the amazement felt by the disciples, perhaps noticing for the first time, the size of the stones of the temple. And Jesus is telling them that not one stone will be left atop another.

He goes further:

there will be wars and rumors of wars, famines, and earthquakes.
He tells them that the very structure of their society will be shattered.

The Gospel of Mark most likely was written in the wake of the destruction of the Temple. The massive renovation by Herod the Great began around 20 B.C. and expanded the temple mount beyond the original temple complex of King Solomon. Although the temple was completed in less than two years,

the outer structures and courtyards required another 80 years.
The temple wasn't finished even as Jesus spoke.

It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the disciples to imagine the complete destruction of such a massive building
– the most holy place of the Jewish faith.
But it was utterly destroyed in 70 A.D. by Roman legions
after four years of revolt in which thousands fought and died
to free themselves from Roman oppression.

“All will be thrown down.”

Jesus reminds us the structures of this world are fragile.
The things that Jesus describes – war and rumors of war,
famine, earthquakes – were occurring then – as well as now.
People were divided then – as well as now.

The last time I can remember our nation being as polarized as it is now
was in the late 60s and early 70s over the Vietnam War.
That was when a lot of writing was about the end times
– when Jesus was coming back.
My Mom and Dad's favorite was “The Late Great Planet Earth.”

In it the author, Hal Lindsey, lined up world events
with the Book of Revelation and claimed the “End is Nigh”
– It was a time of the coming Apocalypse.

The word *apocalypse* means unveiling, uncovering,
revealing that which had been hidden.
The language in Mark and Daniel is what is called apocalyptic writing,
Which often is filled with with bizarre images and strange symbolism.

Generally speaking, we see apocalyptic writings abound come
during times of trial and turmoil.
Given what this nation just went through and the world is going through, it's not surprising to see all
the conspiracy theories
being spread as folks doomscroll on social media.

You may be surprised to consider that the apocalyptic writing
in the Old and New Testaments, including Chapter 13 of Mark,
are not visions of doom, but were written
to give a people under persecution a vision of hope:
No matter how dire events seem to be,
God is still God; God still reigns; the future is God's alone.

Our hope as Christians is to live our lives with the confidence
that God's purpose for this world will be achieved – eventually.

The problem is we all have Thanksgiving coming up,
and friends and families gather together,
and they don't always share the same political views.
My family's gatherings back in the day often ended up in shouting matches.

In case you're wondering about how to deal with upcoming gatherings, Mother Mary Ann last Sunday talked about being a centrist
and offered her wise council about dealing with what may come.

For Thanksgiving, We all need to give thanks, gather to be together,
and skip the anxiety. There's more than enough to go around.
We live in a state of high anxiety.
The wind up to the election was filled with it:
Be afraid; be afraid of immigrants; be afraid of the economy collapsing;
be afraid of losing your jobs; be afraid of losing your health;
be afraid of losing our economic security;
be afraid for our children's future; be afraid of rejection.
And if that's not enough: FOMO – Be afraid of Missing Out.

If we live in fear, we are captives of our own anxiety,
and we never really live.

It seems we are possessed of a deep-seated need to create something,
do something, build something that will transcend the finitude
of our earthly lives.
Here in this place we build community that reaches beyond these pews
into Los Alamos, New Mexico, the United States and the World.

Father Kelly reminded us last week of how Trinity on the Hill
became a church, and what that church came to mean to him,
to the generations before and since his blessed ministry.

We are here in this place because those who came before us
gave of themselves to build this church.
We gather here each week to share in the prayers grounded in our own needs, in the needs of those
we know, and the needs of those we hear of, and as much as anything else, we pray for our hopes in
the future.

Sometimes we don't feel like we have the words to express what we need and what we hope for, but
here we can share in the words
given to us by those who wrought the word of God
through trial and tribulation.

Last week many of you turned in your cards to let the Vestry know
the amount you think you can give toward next years budget.
This is the witness you provide to each other.

Saint Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) back in the sixteenth century

foresaw the need for us as the Body of Christ to be present to the world. Her job description for each of us:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
with Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

I would only add, that Christ has no wallet in this world but yours.
We give so that others may do the work for us in places we cannot be,
and we give to this church to give us the place where we and others
may come together to share and from which
we offer the world our ministry.

A friend of mine once wished for me:
“May you always live as if you are immortal.”
That’s what we believe when we’re young.
We dare things.
We do things.
We step boldly where angels fear to tread.
I think it’s good advice.
We should live as if we are immortal.
That’s the promise given us through the Resurrection,
and the reminder of the Collect of the Day
that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.