

Nov 18, 2018: Proper 28. 1 Sam 1:4-20; 1 Sam 2:1-10; Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-8

Here in America we're used to seeing big, iconic buildings... In California we have the pyramid-shaped Transamerica building and Grace Cathedral in San Francisco; the magnificent State Capitol building in Sacramento; awesome Hearst Castle in San Simeon; the amazing Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. We're so used to seeing grandiose architecture, we just take it for granted.

Bring your imagination for a moment to Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. Everywhere you look the dwellings and places of business are one or two stories high - except for the Temple. Herod's Temple was magnificent. It was the largest and most imposing structure for hundreds of miles in any direction, 150 ft high, about 9 stories. Some of the stones were enormous. Its front face was covered in white marble and gold, reflecting the sun's rays as if it were God's glory.

The Temple was the symbol of God's presence with the people of Israel. And so imagine Jesus standing at the bottom of that great compound with his disciples, in effect saying: "So you're impressed by this grandiose architecture? There's not a stone in the whole works that is not going to end up in a heap of rubble."

That would have been a shocking statement. Naturally, the disciples want to know more: "Tell us, when is this going to happen? What sign

will we get that things are coming to a head?” Jesus doesn’t give them a straight answer. He simply tells them they need to be aware of what is going on. Don’t get overly alarmed – the end is near, but not yet.

I get frustrated when I hear Christians focussing on the End Times. No one knows when this world will cease as it is, in a state of war, corruption and greed. The pain and suffering of life feels awful like death, but this is what Jesus calls “birth pangs” in our passage today, and birth pangs generally lead to new life – the new life of God’s kingdom of peace and healing and re-creation. Meanwhile as we wait for this to come into completion, there is plenty of work for us to do.

In the days of the Old Covenant, the Temple was the place where God was said to dwell, in the Sanctum Sanctorum, Holy of Holies. There the priests continually made sacrifices to atone for the people’s sins. Our Epistle reading speaks of the futility of these sacrifices and points to the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus Christ made, rendering all other sacrifices completely unnecessary:

“Every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” For by

a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Returning again to the image of the Temple and our Gospel reading, Jesus was prophesying the destruction of the Temple. And the Temple – the symbol of God’s presence - was destroyed by fire in AD70, and completely crumbled down to rubble. The destruction of the Temple was a visible sign of the clear message of Jesus, that God’s new way of being present with God’s people would not involve being stuck in a building. Again from our Epistle,

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,” He also adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.”

The meaning for us today is this: God now dwells in us, and not in a building. The Church is the people, and not the building. Here in this beautiful building and on this lovely campus, we worship God together, we learn more about God and about each other, and we go out fed and nourished to do the reconciling work of God in the world. When we pledge our money, time and talents, were not pledging to this church building, we’re pledging to God and to one another as the Church.

In our Old Testament Responsorial passage, Hannah proclaimed, “There is no rock like our God.” In the Book of Isaiah the Messiah to come is referred to as “the Cornerstone”. In the New Testament, St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians says that we believers are “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”

When the world outside seems to be crumbling around us, we must remember that we are called to be re-builders, entrusted by God as midwives of God’s kingdom, commissioned to proclaim it’s truth as we carry Jesus’ name. We are the bearers of this message of reconciliation, built on the foundation of Christ, who is our cornerstone. The message of today’s readings is that God now dwells among us and within us. So we need not be afraid. When we believed into Christ, He came to live in our hearts and minds. Christ is the sources of our new life. And from our grounding here together as the communion of saints, we go forth to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

Amen.