

Psalm 16  
Mark 13:1-8  
Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Irene Pak Lee  
November 14, 2021

## Not One Stone

For those of you who follow certain social media accounts, a lot of content that is posted these days have what's called a "content warning" or a "trigger warning" before telling you what it's about. It's to prepare you for the emotive or memory reaction you may have to what is going to be shared. If I'm honest, I feel like a trigger warning could go up for a lot of biblical passages, but this one from Mark is not one that would normally make that list. However, I want to confess to you all that I've been struggling with it all week as the lectionary text I'm preaching for you this morning because the last time I preached this text from the gospel of Luke's version of it was the Sunday after the Presidential election in 2016. Talk about a trigger warning. The flood of emotions of that week, how I would prepare a sermon for you all and find the words to say and pray, it was all so overwhelming and all of that came back to me again.

If you had the wherewithal to pay attention to me, I must have looked nervous that Sunday morning because right before worship began, as I sat up here, a member of ours, Kim, came up to me and slid me a little piece of paper and it simply said, "you got this" with a heart on it. You all, it meant so much to me and gave me the courage to proclaim a message for you all that day.

Five years later, so much has happened and changed and yet the word of our God remains...and here I am again with this text. What is it that has been revealed to us since that time? Or rather, what has been uncovered? When we look at the landscape of our world today, what is it that we see?

If you were here last week, this scripture directly follows the one Rev. Sammie preached with the widow who gave of her last two coins to the temple treasury, all that she had. Jesus points her out to his disciples and says "See her? Pay attention to her. Look at what she's doing." And he says this in the midst of a grand temple and others coming in long fancy robes and the sound of vast amounts of clinking coins being given to the temple treasury. Jesus sees what no one sees, what no one is paying attention to, and directs attention there, to a widow, *her* gift, and shares a lesson with his disciples.

So it is right after that scene that we begin our reading today and Jesus and the disciples walk out of the temple. And wouldn't you know it, the *first* thing a disciple

comments on is the majestic architecture of the building itself. He says this right after Jesus says those things do not matter and to pay attention not to the grand things that are obviously shiny but to the small and faithful acts that make a difference in the sight of God. It's like the lesson went in one ear and right out the other within minutes, and I'm guessing Jesus is feeling pretty frustrated. Knowing that context, you can hear the frustration in his response.

'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' <sup>2</sup>Then Jesus asked him, 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.'

Now to be fair to the disciple who says this, I read that according to a 1<sup>st</sup> century historian, Josephus, that the Jerusalem temple that he's commenting on was truly an awe-inspiring wonder. It was not just another building, but it was like nothing they had ever seen. It's one of those architectural marvels that you ooo and ahhh at every time you see it. It had been newly constructed by Herod the Great and the walls were composed of stones forty feet long and that the temple platform was four times as large as the Athenian Acropolis. Not only that, Herod apparently used so much gold to cover the outside walls that you could not even look directly at it in the bright sunlight. And so like any of us would, when we see something amazing, we want to share it with someone nearby. "Look, Teacher! Check it out! Look at this beautiful building!"

And Jesus is not impressed because even though they are looking at the same thing, they are not seeing the same thing.

Because for the disciple, this temple goes beyond a majestic building. It is for him a symbol of God's unshakeable presence. It holds religious memory, story, pride, and worthiness. It is a symbol of certainty for him AND it's huge and on display for the world to see as well. He's proud of it and what it represents.

In the early days of the pandemic, when we were all sheltered in place, when Sammie and I were preaching from home and unable to be in this building at all, I did not realize how much I had missed this physical space until about a year later when we were granted permission to record from this place for you all. And I remember walking into this sanctuary after almost a year of not even stepping foot into it, and I just started crying. There is something holy about this space, right?

And so, even though it's not laced with gold walls and four times the size of anything majestic, I understand what this disciple is feeling about the temple. It's not only that it's beautiful. It holds a lot more and means a lot more to them than that. And so

then I can also imagine the shock and dismay of hearing Jesus' response to that treasured space and place.

“Not one stone will be left here upon another. All will be thrown down.”

That line hits a little close to home when you're literally surrounded by a stone church.

Because in the midst of everything that has happened in the past 5 years or so, in all that has been revealed or unveiled, I think this passage is revealing to us today that Jesus still does not see what it is we see. We see what's temporary. Even in that majestic temple that holds religious memory and sentimental space that seems like it could never be destroyed, he sees the destruction of it one day. He sees fragility, not permanence. Change, not stasis. And whether you're a disciple then or a disciple now, hearing this is still unnerving.

By the time this passage was recorded, the temple had been destroyed, by the way. So the listeners see what Jesus saw.

But in that moment, the disciples had not. So it's no wonder that the disciples follow up and ask Jesus when this is all going to happen because they want to be prepared for it. They believe him, but they just want a heads up.

When you hear the rest of this passage, it sounds very apocalyptic – very end-of-times lingo. People use these next words to predict the world's end and usually to instill fear. And honestly, it does sound scary. Warnings of people who will try and lead you astray, wars, nation against nation, earthquakes, famine. It's no wonder that it's referred to as an apocalyptic passage as well.

But the word apocalypse does not mean “end of the world.” In fact, it simply means an unveiling. To see reality as we have not seen it before. Accurate vision. And if you can get past what sounds scary, Jesus in the midst of it tells his disciples do NOT be alarmed.

Do not give into despair, do not capitalize on chaos. Remember that God is not where people often say God is and God is not impressed with what impresses us. And by stating that not one stone will be left upon another, Jesus is reminding the disciples that no matter what kind of box or building we want to keep God in, God will not be confined in that way – no matter how beautiful, no matter how sentimental it is to us. We are reminded that God is bigger than our own imaginations.

Friends, a lot has been revealed and uncovered to us as a church, as a nation, as a global community since I last preached this text. And I guess the question I am pondering for all of us today is what are we doing as we have been learning or seeing humanity in a new way? Are we falling back into old patterns that feel familiar and safe but only provide for our own safety? Have we heard Jesus' call to see the widow and already gone back to marvel at a shiny building? Or can we continue to stick with Jesus and choose to see what it is he sees? The reality of what it is he sees?

Because you see, when I preached from this similar text 5 years ago, I remember proclaiming and hoping and calling for a time for us to have the courage to see and name what it is that was being revealed to us...the realities of those facing injustices, racism, poverty, and all of the other-isms in our society. I remember proclaiming and hoping and calling for us to not be driven apart by fear but to come together in love for one another and for our neighbor, even if that meant the deconstruction of the things we loved and held dear. And I remember proclaiming, hoping and calling for us to do this together. To practice it together here.

And so although it makes us still uncomfortable to hear Jesus saying "not one stone will left upon another, that it will all be thrown down," can we continue to embrace a journey of faith that might include rubble, ruin and failure? Can we release our grip on what we know or what seems permanent and receive the invitation from Jesus to evolve and change? What lies do we mistake for the truth? And am I willing to sit with the fact that things fall apart, things we built, loved, and hoped for? Are you?

Because I think that's the challenge for us this morning. It does not really feel good. It can be painful. But the call from Jesus is to continue to see what it is that he sees and to not be afraid. That even as the world continues to change and loud of voices of destruction seem to be taking over, our challenge as the people of God is to continue to make peace, to choose hope, to cultivate patience and embody love. Friends, things are still being uncovered. We need to still practice seeing the widow and not being lured by the shiny building. And so let's hold each other tight and pull back the veil. See the widow. Not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down.

Church, even as we sit with this tension and reality this day, remember that even as birth pangs hurt, even as we are called to bear witness in the ruins, what God births will never lead to desolation. Not one stone will stand. But we will. So let's keep going and let us trust in that hope this day. We got this. May it be so. Amen.