

2024 11 17 – *The Uncovering*

Scripture: Mark 13:1-8 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

It is Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus and his disciples have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish Passover. Jesus has just spent the afternoon teaching in the temple and he and his disciples are leaving, probably heading back to Bethany to stay with friends overnight.

And, as they are leaving the temple one of the disciples says, “Look Teacher! What huge stones these are! what wonderful buildings!” This is a very appropriate thing to say. The temple in Jerusalem is magnificent. The stones are massive. Some are as large as 40 feet long, 10 feet high and 14 feet wide, with an estimated weight of 500 tons. I’m sure to the disciple it seems not only beautiful but also indestructible.

Jesus responds saying, “See these great buildings? Not a single stone will be left on another. Everything will be torn down.”

We know that Jesus was correct in his shocking prediction, the temple was indeed destroyed by the Roman army nearly 40 years later during the Jewish rebellion. Some scholars argue that, when the author of the Gospel of Mark wrote these words, he was already aware of the destruction of the temple, so he may have put these words in Jesus’ mouth. Others believe that Jesus did accurately predict what was going to happen.

But either way, there is much we can learn from his words. As Jesus and his disciples continue on their way outside the city, Jesus stops on the Mount of Olives, turns to look at the temple and goes on to share predictions of false prophets, wars, earthquakes and famine. His rather dark vision continues on past today's scripture reading. Some refer to this chapter as Mark's "little apocalypse," comparing it to the much longer apocalyptic vision in Revelation.

For most of us, the word apocalypse probably brings to mind movies about the aftermath of a nuclear war or the threat of an asteroid hitting our planet. There are certainly lots of post-apocalyptic movies being created these days. Some would argue that we are living through an apocalyptic time right now, a time of destruction and change. Who knows what climate change will bring to our planet or what will be the result of our current political divide? Who knows what will happen to institutions like churches and service clubs, to news organizations and retail giants? What will be the impact of Artificial Intelligence? We are surrounded by so much change it's hard to keep track.

But Greek scholars will tell us that an apocalypse is actually something quite different. It comes from a Greek word that means an unveiling or uncovering. It is a disclosure of something secret and hidden. To experience an apocalypse is to experience fresh sight, honest disclosure, an accurate revelation. It is to understand reality as we've never understood it before.

<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2010-not-one-stone>

When Jesus looked at the temple in Jerusalem he saw something quite different than what the disciple saw. The disciple saw the biggest, boldest, and most unshakeable symbol of God's presence he was capable of imagining. For him, those massive stones held precious Jewish memory and identity. I know that feeling. I feel it when I look at the church buildings where I have worshipped and preached. I felt it in Rome when I visited St. Peter's Basilica, and in London at St. Paul's Cathedral.

But Jesus was able to see beyond the grandeur and the history and recognize that the temple in Jerusalem was literally just a pile of stones. Debi Thomas, an author and self-professed "church nerd," in her article on this scripture reading wrote:

... what Jesus offers his disciples is an apocalyptic vision. He invites them to look beyond the grandeur of the temple, and recognize that God will not suffer domestication. The temple is not the epicenter of [God's] salvific work; God is not bound by mortar and stone. God exceeds every edifice, every institution, every mission statement, every strategic plan, and every symbol human beings create in [God's] name.

<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2010-not-one-stone>

God, the Holy Mystery, Sacred Love is with us no matter what. God doesn't need all those boxes that we create: the buildings, the doctrine, the tradition. God is and will always be. And that is Good News because change happens.

The individual worlds we have created for ourselves will shatter. It is inevitable. On Friday I officiated at a funeral for an 85 year old man and preached using the famous scripture from Ecclesiastes Chapter 3, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.” Last week, I preached about building with Sacred Love and this week, I’m letting you know that even those things built with Love will eventually come down. But the good news is that if they were truly built with Love then they were not built in vain. Their positive impact will continue in the lives of those that were a part of the relationship, the family, the church, the organization, the town, the culture, and will be passed on through them.

When an apocalyptic event occurs, when the stones of our lives are “all thrown down,” then there will be grieving, there should be grieving. But we also need to ask ourselves, “What is the apocalypse, the revelation, the uncovering that is occurring? What truth is being unveiled? What new insight are we being given?” It doesn’t really matter what kind of apocalyptic event it is, it has the potential to lead to new understanding and new growth.

Today’s scripture reading ends with the words, “yet this is only the beginning of the labor pains.” One obvious response is to think, “O my gosh, how much pain can I endure? What else can happen?” But we could also think, “labour pains, what is being birthed, what new thing is Sacred Love creating? What can we do to help even in the midst of the pain?”

No matter what stones have been torn down, no matter what apocalyptic thing is happening, it is important for us know that we are not alone. The Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being is with us and working through us. We are not being punished and we certainly haven't been abandoned. In fact, we are being called to be a part of a birthing process. We are being called to support each other as the world changes around us. We are being called to open ourselves to new possibilities even in the midst of destruction. We are being called to respond with the Love, the Sacred Love that is flowing through us.

May it be so. Amen.