

Proper 28
Year B 2018

Mark 13:1-8

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

As luck would have it,
we are blessed again today
with a gospel passage that seems incomprehensible.

What is Mark trying to get at in this passage?

What message of the ministry of Jesus is being offered to us?

Part of the difficulty with today's passage
is that it is not meant to stand alone.

We are only able to begin to tease out Jesus' message
to the disciples and to us, here and now,
when we examine this passage
together with last week's gospel of the widow and her offering.

As we just heard,
Jesus and the disciples
have just exited the temple after viewing the crowds
and the widow contributing to the treasury.

The actions of the widow have been misunderstood by many,
including the disciples,
from the moment the widow
deposited her two coins into the treasury.

This passage was never meant to be an inspiration,
if you will, for people to give all that they had
to the temple or faith community at their detriment.

Newsflash folks: an accurate read of scripture
does not in any way support the concept of
a prosperity gospel wherein the haves
reap financial benefits at the expense of the have-nots.

Ched Myers,
a well respected commentator of the gospel of Mark,
sets forth one of the themes that
runs throughout the Markan gospel
in his commentary, *Binding the Strong Man*:

That:

“Jesus utterly repudiates the temple state,
which is to say, the entire socio-symbolic order of Judaism.
His objections have been consistently based upon one criterion:
the system’s exploitation of the poor.”

Jesus renounces the scribal class in his exhortation:

“They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance
and say long prayers.”

And again:

“Truly I tell you, this poor widow
has put in more than all those
who are contributing to the treasury.

For all of them have contributed
out of their abundance;
but she out of her poverty
has put in everything she had,
all she had to live on.”

The point Jesus is making
is that they all gave from their affluence
but the widow, in her destitution,
gave everything she had – her whole life.

The temple has robbed this woman
of her very means of support.

The temple, like the scribal class,
no longer protects widows but instead exploits them.

Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*.

Jesus, in his renunciation,
exits the temple for the final time.

Jesus takes up his position of the Mount of Olives,
facing the temple and begins his indictment:

“Do you see these great buildings?
Not one stone will be left here upon another;
all will be thrown down.”

It is too much for the disciples to digest.

How could such a beautiful structure,
built for the glory of God, be destroyed and why?

Jesus continues,
trying to help them understand
his disavowment of the temple state,
as it has lost its way.

Construction and worship of a building
built at the expense of the poor and needy
and operating as a means of exploitation
is not to be tolerated.

It is not in alignment with God's desire
for all humanity.

Jesus has come to help all understand
that it must be destroyed
in order to be returned to God's purposes
and not those co-opted by humanity.

He warns the disciples
to be wary of being unintentionally caught up
with those who will continue to fight for the
maintenance of the temple state.

Their position, he warns,
is on the side of the widow, orphan,
blind, lame and leper.

As is evidenced in scripture,
all that which is not of God,
and at work redeeming, healing, and supporting
that which is of God, must be overthrown.

What does all of this mean for us here today?

For us individually and for us as the community of St. Andrew's.

In the event you are not aware,
and I don't know how that could happen but...,
we are on the bullet train
screaming towards Black Friday.

Many will blast right past
one of the most important days
on the American calendar, Thanksgiving.

For Americans and Canadians,
it is our unique opportunity
to offer our praise and thanksgiving
for all that we are, all that we can be,
and all that we have been given.

Now, there are some who will actually skip
the entire Thanksgiving holiday
to camp out at a retailer
or computer screen of their choice
to “score” the best deal on some material object.

Some will actually suffer injury
as a result of mob scenes
of folks who are convinced that
it is imperative that they have certain objects
so they can be counted
among the “successful” in our society.

All of this a blanket exploitation of the have nots by the haves.

A direct rejection of all that the gospel of Jesus Christ
made manifest in his life
and very being as he lived and walked among us.

What does today’s gospel message
regarding the temple as tool for oppression
mean for us here today?

For us individually and for us as the community of St. Andrew’s.

Are we able to look at our beautiful church and grounds
and ask honestly
how we see these as benefits
for the renewal of the world?

Are we able to look critically at this building,
this sanctuary built to the glory of God,
and assess where we stand
on worshipping the beauty of the building
in contrast to the use of a beautiful building
to overcome the oppression and exploitation
of our suffering brothers and sisters
who are just beyond these walls?

Are we willing to take a hard look
at the decisions we make
about the use of all that has been given us
here at St. Andrew's,
and yes,
I do mean given.

We have not earned any of this,
or deserve it more than others
just because we have the means to keep it up,
or because we're holier,
or we're Episcopalians,
more welcoming or for any other reason.

We are the trustees
in this time and place
by the sheer grace of God.

So are we doing the best we can with what we have?

Are we making
decisions about the use of all that we have
which show forth the greatest desire of God?

The preeminent desire that
all that we have is shared with those
who so desperately need to know
the love of God as has been made known to us
through Jesus the Christ.

Are we truly able to share what we have been
given for the benefit of those who are so desperately in need
in this neighborhood and this City?

Just beyond our red door on Glenarm
there are people dying in the streets for lack of shelter,
lack of proper medical care,
lack of mental health services,
lack of access to proper food,
and lack of the ability by some to be seen as fully human.

I pray that all of us will spend time,
especially on Thursday,
to ponder these questions,
to assess what we have and what we can do with what we have
to the glory of God.

Let us pray:

Let us remember Jesus:

Who believed in people to the last and never despaired of them;
who through all disappointment never lost heart,
who disregarded his own comfort and convenience,
and thought first of others needs,
and though he suffered long, was always kind.

May this mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus.