

## ***TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST***

***Mark 13:1-8***

St. Mark's Gospel for today, locates us in Jerusalem, near the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus and his disciples were leaving one of the most spectacular structures in biblical times. The disciples couldn't help but marvel at its majesty. There were gates and arches, tunnels and stairways, the stones were gleaming white with extensive gold overlay. The outside was decorated with marble walls and columns. The eastern side of the temple was plated with gold and the ten gates into the temple were covered in gold or silver. It must have been quite a sight as the gleaming white marble and stunning metal work flashed in the Middle Eastern sun. For the people of Jerusalem the temple was a sign of the glory that would return to Israel.

The disciples were obviously impressed and awed at the sight of this remarkable building. "Look Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings"! What Jesus said next almost amounted sacrilege.

*"You see these great buildings"? he said. "Not a single stone here will be left in its place; every one of them will be thrown down".* If that isn't bad enough, Jesus goes on to talk about the end of all things.

The whole of chapter thirteen of Mark's Gospel contains all kinds of signs that will indicate when the end is near. He

warned about times when the followers of Jesus will be persecuted and brought before judges and kings. Family members will turn against each other. He told of unnatural things happening in the heavens. Jesus gives all kinds of signs when the end will come near, but at what precise moment these things will happen; only God the Father knows.

We have seen a lot of these predictions come true. There have been wars, and earthquakes, natural disasters of all kinds. It's obvious that there is still more to come. Christians have been persecuted and these will continue to happen. In fact, if we take seriously all the predictions of the Bible about the end of the world, we are left with a terrifying picture. It would seem that everything solid, even something as solid as the temple, every human relationship, even the people close to us in our families, everything that we put our trust in, everything that we love in this life, everything that we thought would go on forever, will all be suddenly wiped away when the end of the world finally comes.

Scary, isn't it? Things that we think are so permanent in our lives, in actual fact, are only temporary. It's hard to imagine what life would be like without those things and those people that give us a sense of security. The things we own, our wealth, our accomplishments, all the things we think are important, are actually very temporary. In a moment, they can be taken away and 'the rug is pulled out from under us' so to say. Mass shootings in the United States, and here in Canada, are a cruel reminder of this. We discover that the things that we thought were so solid and important, are not the things that we can really rely on.

Many people with serious conditions in hospital beds, have come to the conclusion that all the things that they once thought

were important, were not important at all. None of those things could prevent their cancer, or even their death. All the things that were so important to them before their illness mean absolutely nothing to them in their current situation. Even the doctors can't provide the assurance of longer life.

It is then that faith in Jesus and the assurance, comfort and the hope that he offers, is all that matters. The promises of Jesus that we have heard a thousand times before, suddenly take on new meaning and importance, as all the other things that we once thought important are pushed aside. Our God, and His promises of love, strength to endure, and the joy of eternal life in the end, are all that we need. This is what Jesus is really getting at when he says, *"Not a single stone here will be left in its place; every one of them will be thrown down"*. As wonderful as the successes and the things of this life are, they are not permanent.

And we are so easily led by the lie that the things of this world are so important and that we could never exist without them. When Jesus talks about what will happen in the future, don't believe for one minute that he is telling us horror stories to terrify us like kids huddled around a campfire listening to scary ghost stories. He is simply pointing out what we so easily forget. Our journey through life in this world is short, we are travelers passing through, and that our true home is in heaven, and our true wealth is knowing Jesus' love and care for each and every one of us.

The biblical writers have recorded the details about the end of the world to reassure us that, in the end, what is important is not so much *what* is coming, but *who* is coming.

The lead up to the end of the world might be scary in one sense, but Jesus will always be ready to help us get through it. When the last day finally arrives, Jesus will return. He is our loving

Saviour. Those whom He loves, and those who trust in Him, have nothing to fear during these last days when everything is in chaos. Not even the idea of the Last Judgement can fill us with fear, because we know that all the sins that could possibly condemn us, and send us to everlasting punishment, have been washed away with the blood of Jesus.

Yes, everything that we thought would last forever will pass away, but we will be taken up into heaven to a life that *will* last forever.

In spite of the terrible things happening in the world: earthquakes, wars, terrorist attacks, and famines; in spite of persecutions, suffering, and betrayals; in spite of fire, the earth melting, and heavenly bodies dissolving in a flash of blinding light, and as terrifying as all this can be, “*we will always be with the Lord*”, nothing, absolutely nothing, will separate us from the protection, the power, and the love of Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer.

**AMEN.**