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Hebrews 10:11-25

Mark 13:1-8

In some ways, it is a little difficult to find the “good news” in our Gospel reading today. It is from the thirteenth chapter of Mark, often called the “Little Apocalypse.” We get only a smidgen today, but it is enough. The destruction of the Temple, false prophets, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines – not the most uplifting bit of scripture. At least it is Mark. In Matthew and Luke there is more, the full “Olivet Discourse” as it is called because our Lord was speaking on the Mount of Olives. For many, it is a description of the end of the world.

It is talking about the end of *a* world, the world of First-Century Judaism. The destruction of the Temple in 70 AD marked the end of Judaism as it had been known. No longer could the people offer sacrifices. No longer was there a symbol of unity for the Jewish people, no longer a physical home for God in this world. It was gone, not one stone left atop another. And with it, the source of identity for thousands of people. It was the end of their world.

But there is a message of hope within the destruction. It is the promise that God will not forsake his people, no matter what the world looks like. Every generation since the first hearers of the Olivet Discourse has faced an end. People have for centuries believed that the end of the world was imminent. People look around and think, “How can it get any worse? Surely this must be the end.” And yet we continue on. And God is still with us.

I'm not quite sure what the motivation is, thinking that the world is so bad that it can't possibly continue. While I am not prone to Pollyanna-ism, I don't feel the same sense of dread and foreboding that so many seem to do. Of course, there are an awful lot of people out there who know that fear is a powerful motivation. If you can get people to fear, you can control them. I'll do anything, just keep me safe. I suppose that is why we read in Scripture so many times, “Fear not.” Fear is not the natural condition of the Christian. What have we to fear? Is there anything too powerful for God? Is there any force who can overcome the Creator of the universe? Is there anything that can stand against the One who has conquered death itself?

And yet millions live in fear. And there is a multitude ready to take advantage of that fear. It is a booming business. There is no denying that terrible things happen. Just this week we read and watched the reports from Paris. Every day, thousands die needlessly. We live in a lost and broken world. But we also know that that world is in the hands of a mighty God. We have a great high priest in Jesus Christ who opens the way into the true Temple in the presence of God, and invites us to join him. We are not left alone to deal with this world; our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has been where we are, and he has promised to never forsake us. What have we to fear?

A great deal of ink has been spilled over the years by folks trying to make some money off of

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people's fear and uncertainty. "Just read my book and you will know what is about to happen." "Just listen to me, and send me money, and I will make sure that you know what is really going on." These are the false prophets our Lord warns us about, leading many astray. But how do we know the true prophets? Our new presiding bishop points us in the right direction.

In his installation sermon this past All Saints Day, Bishop Curry told us, "If it is not love, it is not of God." God is love. And all that we do is to be based in the idea of loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. What we do and say is to build up, not tear down. To bring people together, not to make new walls. There are enough walls. It is not even our job to defend God. As if God would need our defense. We are to love. Love people, and love God enough to trust what God says.

The world of the First-Century Jews was rocked. But in the loss of the physical Temple, folks were forced to trust in the heavenly temple, one not made with human hands. Jews were forced to learn that real worship depends upon their heart, not their location. So did God cause the destruction of the temple to teach a lesson? Certainly not. Just because God can redeem a tragedy, it does not mean that God caused a tragedy.

When our world is shaken, we, too, can trust that God can redeem it. I do not subscribe to the idea that God does horrible things to people in order to teach them a lesson. And yes, I've read all the passages about refiner's fire and such. I still do not see how a God that is Love can visit disaster upon people just to make a point. We live in a lost and broken world. But God can redeem whatever we face. No matter how many stones are torn down in our lives, God is still right there with us. His love will never fail.

The writer of Hebrews admonishes his readers to provoke one another to love and good deeds and not to neglect meeting with one another, encouraging one another, such comforting words. In a society that teaches us it is good to hate and to fear, we are called by our Lord Jesus Christ to love and to encourage. How can we fear the world when we believe in God? How can we fear anything, when our Lord Jesus Christ has conquered all? Fear not. Be of good cheer. God is with us. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*