

**Sermon Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost, November 17, 2024, Mark 13: 1-8,
Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lancaster, Pa. Rev. Timothy W. Sadler**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The original temple, built by Solomon in Jerusalem, had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Another Temple was eventually built; both the Book of Ezra and the Book of Nehemiah talk about this.

Time after time, though, this temple was desecrated by whatever nation or ruler happen to be in power over the Jews.

In 20 BC, Herod the Great renovated and expanded the temple. But in 70 BC, it was destroyed by the Romans during the siege of Jerusalem. It's this destruction of the temple Jesus talks about in today's gospel lesson from Mark.

These verses are part of a larger farewell teaching that Jesus gives His disciples. In preparing them for the chaos and destruction that lies ahead, Jesus is trying to let the disciples know—beyond all doubt---that the Kingdom of God is so much more than anyone building, even a building as important as the temple.

So, when the temple is destroyed, the disciples shouldn't lose hope. And its destruction shouldn't be for them, a sign that the end times are near; nor should they feel that their faith and hope---have been destroyed along with the temple.

I can remember in the early 1970's when my home church was burnt to the ground. There was a series of church fires in Gettysburg that occurred due to arson. After four of our churches and several attempts of other buildings being burnt the arsonist was caught. The irony was that he was one of the volunteer firemen.

My project for the Pro Deo Et Patria Award was helping to clean up and retrieve items from the fire. I can still see the charred remains, the smell of the burnt wood, and the creaking of the half burn church aisles under my feet. But St. James, the community of faith, did not burn up with the physical building.

Don't get me wrong, it was sad and disheartening. But we went on and were generously offered the chapel of the Abiding Presence for our worship space and Old Dorm for our Sunday School and Confirmation classes by the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg. We survived as the church without our building and rebuilt anew.

Life is full of events that frighten us because they're beyond our control, whether it's natural disasters or the unforeseen violation of safe places by a gunman out to harm.

In these verses, Jesus tries to warn us that things like these will always be part of life on earth, because this isn't heaven. Nevertheless, Jesus promises, "I am still with you."

So much of how we respond to things in life depends upon whether we really believe that—believe that Jesus is with us, and because of that, our lives have purpose. We can either live terribly afraid of what might happen...

or choose to live as fully as we are able, knowing that when unexpected things do happen, we are still in the presence of God.

Sometimes when we've been through a hard time, we're worried that it might happen again, and so in order to try and avoid that, we want to put many controls in place because we think that guarantees our safety.

The only thing is, when we seek to rigidly control our lives because we're afraid of what might happen, we may well be leaving very little room for God to work.

When we try to shut ourselves off from the heartaches in life, we stand in danger of closing ourselves off from the deeper joys as well.

Many years ago, when Karen and I lived in Chambersburg we unexpectedly lost our dog, Mickey (under unusual circumstances.). We were heartbroken. I must admit I was a little angry at God, because I felt that all this work Karen and I did for God should have given us, at least a little protection from the normal losses of life. I guess I thought Karen being a pastor and as I was in the midst of attending Seminary to become a pastor should make us special.

As I processed all this grief and anger, I thought I'd never want to get another dog. I'd spare myself that pain. Then, as unexpectedly as Mickey had left us, Chance (our to be new dog) entered our lives.

He was a young, large Golden Retriever and it seems he was led right into the heart of our family.

I've had many dogs over my earthly life, but I've never known another dog like Chance. The bond he shared with us was amazing. His lose was one of my greatest, yet had I tried to protect myself from feeling that pain,

I never would have known the joy and companionship of this remarkable dog. I would have missed out on so much life.

We can't close off part of ourselves without also closing off another. The more we try to shield ourselves from pain, the more we'll also be shielding ourselves from love.

There is no way in this life that we can prepare for every hurt, that we can insulate ourselves against pain---not if we want to fully live. Jesus wanted His disciples to know that loss and conflict and disasters and catastrophes are all part of life, and when they happen, we shouldn't feel like the world is coming apart, or even more importantly, that we're not held and loved.

A while back I quoted a line from Leonard Cohen's Anthem—"there is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in." Everything that happens in this world serves a greater purpose, no matter how chaotic or out-of-control it seems to us.

I may have shared this before, but even so—the average number of stars that can be seen from the normal suburbs on a clear night is about 250. But the average number you can see in the wilderness, where there is no light, is, at a minimum, 2,500.

Sometimes we need the darkness in order to see the light. That means we can't live and make decisions as though the darkness will always be the ending of our story.

We are people of the light. We're the people who follow Christ who is the light of the world. This light isn't of our own making—it's not ours to keep going—thank God—because there's a lot of times when we don't feel like we could.

And no matter how dark we think life is, the light is always there within us and all around us because we belong to Christ.

What does our future look like?

The prophets tell us: God will come.

The Good News says: God is already with us.

When we carry that kind of promise in our hearts, we can trust that whatever we need to face and work through in our lives, there the God of all creation will be.

We have a future, this congregation has a future, and that future has a name; that future and that name is Jesus.

Let us pray:

Lord of life, you are present with us through all the chaos and confusion of our lives. You, who experienced life, know how hard this journey can be. Enter into any fears we have and illumine them with your grace. You are a God of endless possibilities, and our lives and futures are in your hands. AMEN.

Children / Young at Heart Story

Theme

Jesus warns us to watch out for false leaders who will deceive us.

Object

None

Scripture

Mark 13:1-8

How many of you know how to play the game "Hana, Hana, Hana, Kuchi?" (Pause for responses.) It's a Japanese game that is a little bit like a combination of "Simon Says" and "Follow the Leader."

Hana is the Japanese word for nose, and *kuchi* is the word for mouth. I will touch my nose three times as I say, "nose, nose, nose," but when I say "mouth," I will touch some other part of my body such as my ear, eye, or chin. You have to touch the part that I say -- not the part I touch. If you touch what I touch instead of what I say, you are out of the game. Let's try it once just for practice.

"Nose, nose, nose, mouth." (Demonstrate by touching your nose when you say "nose" and touching your ear when you say "mouth.")

Uh-oh! I caught a few of you. Well, that was just for practice, so nobody is out of the game. Let's try it again.

"Nose, nose, nose, ear." (Demonstrate by touching your nose when you say "nose" and touching your mouth when you say "ear.")

I caught a few of you again, didn't I?

(Continue to play the game as time permits; then continue with the lesson.)

When we were playing that game, I was trying to trick some of you into doing the wrong thing. It was only a game, and we were just having some fun, but there are times when people try to trick us into doing the wrong thing. Jesus warned about people like that.

One day, Jesus told his disciples to be careful not to let anyone deceive them. He warned that there would be many false teachers who would come teaching in His name and claiming to be Him. Jesus said that many would be fooled.

It was fun trying to trick you in the game of "Hana, Hana, Hana, Kuchi," but it isn't any fun to see people tricked into following false teachers instead of following Jesus. It is important to know what Jesus really teaches in the Bible, so we won't be tricked.

Let us pray,

Dear God, help us to read our Bibles each day and follow Jesus' teachings. Guard us from those pretending to be Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen

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