

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
25th Sunday after Pentecost
18 November 2012
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Mark 13:1-13

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

We often look for greatness in all the wrong things.
Perhaps it was Peter—he's often the one with a foot in his mouth—
who pulled Jesus aside to marvel at the greatness of the Temple stones.

To Peter's credit, they were massive.
Some of these stones, still surviving today, measure 20-40 feet long and weigh over 100 tons!
The Temple was beautiful, large, powerful building, and the center of life.

Some of the emotion Peter and the disciples have is very similar to your own.
This is a beautiful church.
[[Admittedly, you can't do anything here without either going up or down stairs, and
there's no elevator to make life easier—but beautiful nonetheless.]]

Your hands have helped build it.
And if not yours, then your parents, or grandparents, or simply your fathers in the faith.

This place is great, and could you imagine life without it?
Can you imagine a time when one brick isn't left on another?
When the walls are collapsed, the ceiling laying in rubble on the ground,
the stained glass shattered into the grass/street?
Can you imagine the splinters of wood from the pews?
[[or the concrete slab of an altar snapped in two?]]

What sadness.
What would life be like without this great building?

That's what runs through the disciples minds as they walk out of the Temple.
They love this place—it's greatness, and strength, and glory.

But Jesus takes the opportunity to relocate their joy, to strip them of misguided greatness.

We fall into the same trap.
We admire greatness of both buildings and personalities.
We adore success—not always our own, but others as well.
We imagine what this church would be like if all the pews were full, if the voices shook the walls,
and if the offering plate overflowed.

Imagine what we could do then!

Repent, dear Christians.

The greatness of the Church isn't in her numbers or her success, but in Christ the crucified.

All the things we call great will one day lay in ruins.

These are the signs of the end:

deception, false saviors, wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, pain;
suffering, trials, beatings, accusations, death, and hatred.

This is our time.

We live in the end times, the last days.

Deception lurks at every turn; there's no shortage of false doctrine—even in our own churches.

Many have fought for your trust—that they can change things, bring for you an ideal life, success, peace.

And the wars, there's no end to the wars.

Wars among brothers and families and churches and nations.

Wars and rumors of war between religions and races and ancestry and sexuality.

And on top of them all, there's the constant war raging in our own hearts.

Every time we turn around there's another earthquake, another tsunami, another super-storm.

Are they increasing? Maybe. Either way, they're there.

People go hungry, even here in Wichita, but far more and more often yet, all around the world.

And then there's the suffering.

We live in the end times.

The signs that Jesus spoke are truly here and among us now.

So what does Jesus say?

“See that no one leads you astray” (13:5).

“Do not be alarmed” (13:7).

“Be on your guard” (13:9).

As we move toward the end, we are as a Church to be watchful.

Recognize the reality around you.

Notice the pain and the suffering and don't hide from it.

Don't excuse it or try to justify it.

Don't pretend like it will get better.

That's the boat we're in.

All of us.

And we're most at risk when we trust in these large stones.

We're most at risk when we think success and peace and a little utopia can be made in this place.

When we cling to a person or personality, a building, or an ideal—

and not to Jesus, toward whom all these things point.

The Church most prepared for the end is the Church that recognizes that it is the end.

She sees the pain and the suffering and she knows it's her vocation to speak words of healing.

The words of promise.

The words of Jesus.

In the midst of suffering she is to confess—

whether it be on trial at synagogue or the supreme court, she is to confess the Gospel.

“The gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations” (13:10).

And what is that Gospel?

It is the sure and certain word of God that all is finished in Christ.

That sins are forgiven, the end has come, Satan is overthrown, and you are free.

The Gospel is that the end has already come about in Christ the crucified.

He is the True Temple, of which the Jerusalem Temple was just a type or an image.

His body was destroyed, hung on the cross, pierced and wounded for you.

But that was not yet the end.

On the third day our Lord Jesus Christ raised up the Temple from its ruins.

On the third day, the Body of Jesus Christ raised from the dead.

Death was defeated.

Satan cast out.

And the sins of the entire world were covered by the Blood of the Lamb.

So Christians, be on your guard.

Many will come and try to lure you toward things that seem great:

things that promise success and growth and change and peace.

Don't be afraid when the signs seem to increase.

Do not fear when the end seems closer than before.

When that last and final day comes,

“Do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you”

(13:11).

Because it's not you who will speak and testify, but the Holy Spirit, who has turned your body into His Temple.

He will proclaim the Gospel because that's what He does!

And same with you—you're a Christian, that's just who you are.

And as a Christian you will endure to the end and you will be saved—

not by any thing you've said or done or decided or succeeded at—

but because you are in Christ and He is in you.

And this Jesus, who truly is greater than the Temple, has done all things well, *for you*.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit