

Mark 13:1-13    26th Sunday after Pentecost    November 17, 1991

*As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" 2Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."*

*3When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" 5Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 6Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. 7When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.*

*9"As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. 10And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. 11When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; 13and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

They must have hoped Jesus was wrong. His disciples must have hoped with all their being that Jesus word would not be true. For if he was right then their nation, their hopes for the future, their security in the present, all were going to come crashing down. For coming out of the temple one of Jesus disciples had said to him, "Look, teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" And Jesus had responded, Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down."

To Jesus' disciples, to all his people, the Jews, the temple was a sign of God's presence, a sign of their nation's security, its future. For us it would be as if someone was to predict that soon the White House and the Capital, and Wall Street, and our own church building would all lie in ruins. Life as we have known it, as we have thought it must be forever would suddenly cease to be - that is what Jesus' prediction must have sounded like to the disciples.

It happens every day. A child is born, her mother knows that her child will outlive her. But accident, or cancer, or violence snuffs out the child's life, and a mother's world is shaken to the core.

A job that looked like it would be forever disappears, and with it every plan for tomorrow.

A nation grows comfortable with being on top of the world, first, best. But industries close, and so does the future.

A marriage that was forever is ended by unfaithfulness. Divorced is a word that accuses and angers every time it is spoken.

A street was once the envy of all who passed, tidy yards, friendly neighbors. But now it lies in ruins, its churches boarded up, friends and neighbors scattered forever.

And we ask ourselves, "What can I do to keep it from happening to me?"

Can I run fast enough, to stay ahead of decaying neighborhoods?

Can I pray long enough or eat or exercise well enough to escape disease?

Will the right schools, a good security system, proper parenting guard my children's future?

Will the right candidates save our nation from the aging and dying that has come to every other empire?

What can I do to escape when the temple comes crashing down?

Jesus himself prayed about this: "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I will but what you will." When the temple of his body was soon to be torn down on the cross, Jesus pleaded that the cup of suffering might pass from him.

It is not wrong for us to pray and plead and do everything in our power to cling to life, the life we have known. But with Jesus we also pray, your will, Father, be done.

Even as we pray the pillars are crumbling. One in our world lies dying of cancer, another has lost a job - arms one day so strong, grow thin and frail - minds sharp and quick forget names we knew so well. Soon the pillars may be crashing, smashing down upon us. We are afraid.

Jesus words to his disciples were "Beware that no one leads you astray." When life is crumbling, and the rule of life is everyone for himself, Jesus says, "Beware that no one leads you astray."

Will I grab the food from my neighbor's hand that I might live an extra day?

Or hoard tomorrow's bread when brothers and sisters plead for bread today?

Will I run away when times get tough, leave you?

Will you run from me?

*Jesus said, "Brother will betray brother to death, a father his child, children will rise against parents, and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. "*

How we want to be spared such times!

How we pray that such a cup will pass from us!

I don't want cancer, I don't want to see our economy fail, I don't want to witness the suffering of my children.

But if such days come to you and I, how I hope and pray that God's will will be done in us.

Let the cup pass from us, O Lord, but even more let your will be done in us this day, every day.

For God's will is that we cling to him even as Jesus did. Whether Jesus was riding into Jerusalem triumphant on a donkey, crowds cheering, or hanging on the cross, soldiers jeering, God's will for Jesus was the same, That Jesus believe in his Father, and trust in him, and love his brothers and sisters as His Father does.

I am certain that is God's will for you as well. That faith will own your heart, not fear, that love, even for your enemies, will make its home in you. God's will is that hope will be the air you breathe even if steeples are crashing down all around you.

Jesus endured to the end, believing, loving, forgiving, hoping. A new morning of life dawned for him, and in him, and through him.

God's will is exactly this for you also. You will not be spared dying, but you who endure to the end will be saved. You will not be spared tears and terrors and but you who endure to the end will be saved. God does not spare his beloved children the cup of suffering, but he provides you the faith, the hope and the love to endure.

Thanks be to God.