

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



November 14, 2021

LARGE

The seductive awe church buildings inspire

by Drew Downs

In this week's gospel, the disciples are awed at the size of the Temple. It reminds me of moving to Boston from small-town Michigan and being surrounded by skyscrapers. The size inspires awe. So does the thought of how they were built.

Jesus isn't awed by it. Or, at least, he isn't moved to be distracted by it. Or perhaps, more importantly, seduced by what "large" represents: imperviousness.

We are smart enough to know that big *isn't* better. But do often mistake it for power, influence, and permanence. So we believe a big church will always be there.

The awe that large church buildings inspire is good. They provide hope and witness to a community that needs both. But they cannot maintain themselves. Nor do they do all of the work for the church. Because its life is linked to the life of its people.

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Last week I marveled at the suddenness of fall showing up like in-laws appearing at the front door. And now I'm wondering how we're halfway through November already! We like to say that time flies, but what is always confounding is how surprising it always is. We wake up, look at the calendar and find ourselves in the midst of fall, the leaves have thoroughly turned (and perhaps the thermostats have turned on) and we are not entirely sure when this all happened.



Time moves because *it* is the constant. Our sense of the now (the only true sensation we have) is filtered through the noticing of time's movement. So we're always taking snapshots in our minds of the present, only to find they are instant representations of the past.

We get nostalgic this time of year because our traditions naturally guide us there. That sensation holds incredible power; if we're willing to embody the *hope* that Jesus directs us toward. And that hope (not just for *our* future, but for others') can inspire us to acts of service, devotion, and charity that is needed as the seasons change.

There are several ways we are invited to share this season. We are collecting toys for Toys For Tots and clothing items for the homeless. We are also raising funds to preserve our stained glass windows and collecting pledges for the 2022 congregational budget. We do this, not just because it is good, but because God has blessed us to be a blessing to this community. May we all see our place in that now and in the many days to come.

Drew+

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FOR SUNDAY

The Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

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Collect

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Mark 13:1-8

"This is but the beginning of the birthpangs."

Reflection

This week's gospel story is scary. Full-on, toe-curling scary. At least for anyone who thinks war, famine, and the annihilation of everything and everyone they love is the least bit undesirable.

We only read the beginning of the story this week: this passage, known as "The Little Apocalypse" extends beyond the first eight verses and runs through the whole of chapter 13. I suspect many Christians would prefer to treat this like the 13th floor of a hotel and skip it.

What makes this chapter scary is just how inevitable Jesus makes it all sound. He is not simply saying, "watch out, some bad stuff is coming"; he's telling them that

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everything they know and care about is going to change. Some of it for the bad. Some of it for the really bad. But sitting here and evaluating the change isn't the point. The point is that it is going to happen and we ought to prepare for it.

Prepare for a reason: *that we not get caught up in it*. Wars and rumors of wars, for instance has a way of dividing us into camps, not just into right and wrong, but choosing between two wrongs. Getting swept up in the war drumming and before we know it, we are marching into battle to kill and die in wars that are not God's.

It is also important to recognize that Jesus is *warning, not frightening* us. Because fear is itself a problem. Jesus's most used phrase is "Don't be afraid."

Jesus calls these events *signs*. Because they notify us of what is happening. And this signal confusion is the very thing we need to teach ourselves to overcome.

The perfect example of this is Jesus's use of the word "birthpangs". I know it is annoying when a man talks about pain and childbirth, but hear me out. When we were preparing for our daughter's birth, the midwives talked about birthpangs as the body's *signs* of what is going to happen. And when we don't *feel* them, we can't *know* what to do next. It isn't that pain is *good*, but that it is a necessary *signal* to us.

Our bodies carry a wisdom that can help us know what to do, even when we're scared, confused, or experiencing something for the first time.

Pain isn't universally bad or a thing to avoid. It is fundamentally required for growth in every way. It is also our body's alarm system to tell us *what* to pay attention to.

Jesus isn't trying to scare his followers. He's warning them (and us) that we will need to learn perseverance. Because we'll be tempted to go in an entirely different direction.

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