

Sermon Notes – November 17, 2024
The Holy Gospel of St. Mark 13: 1-8
Peace Lutheran Church
“A Note On Confident Trust”

Both Old Testament Daniel's apocalyptic visions, and Jesus' words in Mark 13, address the anxieties of people afraid that they are witnessing the end of the world. Daniel wrote of the Hellenistic empire's attempt to wipe out Judaism on its way toward creating a peaceful monoculture, and in that Daniel offered hope. Mark wrote his words just before or soon after Rome's destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Both of these audiences saw Jerusalem's temple ruined, first when Antiochus IV sacrificed a pig to Zeus on the temple altar, and later when Roman armies burned the temple and pulled down the walls.

This temple that had stood for some four hundred years was as magnificent as anything on earth at the time - 150 feet tall, made of stones the size of semi-trailers. Here was a sign of permanence - God's certainly, but also that of His people. Now, as had happened when Babylon had destroyed the first temple in Jerusalem, this seemed the end of everything and the nation plunged into God-forsakenness.

Daniel's vision promises an after-life beyond the world's end, complete with the justice of a reward for the faithful and the destruction for their detractors. Jesus says, in effect, “So what if the temple falls? It's not the end of the world, only some Braxton-Hicks contractions. Moreover, the toppling of your temple and other sacred symbols is no more worrisome than the inevitable, seductive attraction of pied-piper messiahs who promise, “I alone can save you!”

Exposed here, among other things, is the human penchant for assuming that prosperity and stability equal life in God's care and favor, while poverty, insecurity, and ruin come only to those whom God has abandoned. We all resemble athletes who point piously to heaven when they score but never when they strike out. God makes and loves winners, all others eat dust, or so we prone to naturally assume

We are prone also to forget that the Jerusalem temple, so near falling, also belonged to the hero of last week's gospel lesson, that impoverished widow who invested her last penny there. Was her gift

wasted? Did it, like she may have regarded her life, come to naught? Only as much as did Jesus' own life and gifts - which He gave away to lepers, to long-lost tomb-dwellers, and finally to his last-supper companions, and who couldn't save His life while they watched from a distance as He died.

Never mind what all seems to be falling apart, Jesus urges. Follow Me, not those vacuous voices that promise greatness, power, and vengeance on all who threaten what we have built. When the end does come, amid the genuine writhing and accompanying screams, I'll be with you, and the abyss will prove a birthing room (ask old Hannah - she's been there).