



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea
The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida

“Help us to know, Lord!”
Pentecost 26B – November 17, 2024
Mark 13:1-8

A Homily by The Reverend Jo Popham

Last Sunday as we were reeling from the shake up of losing our beloved tenant Coastline Calvary Church, a 5.9 magnitude earthquake hit Cuba followed by a 6.8 quake within an hour. After shocks are still being felt. People are afraid of sleeping in their homes; many are sleeping in parks.

Our brothers and sisters in Cuba were in the middle of the clean-up efforts following Category 3 Hurricane Raphael the week before. They have endured widespread power outages since Hurricane Oscar in October. We pray that there is no more damage to their homes and infrastructure. And, God forbid, no landslides. It has been described as a “crisis without parallel in the history of [the Cuban] nation.”¹

Some of us remember the devastation the towns and our churches experienced after Hurricane Michael, and how we were encouraged and our spirits were lifted when former Bishop Michael Curry visited that weekend. He went to share God's Word and Holy Eucharist, but he also came to listen and to offer hope. He did the same when he went to Havana. This past summer the deputation from Cuba was seated at General Convention. Cuba is not a little insignificant island. Isolated, yes, but completely part of us and the church. And as such we perhaps should rethink how we at St. Andrew's By-the-Sea view how blessed we are. Considering how we make up for the shortfall in our budget is not of apocalyptic significance, is it? We have a large beautiful campus. We are being responsible in the care and plans for our property. That we need to make decisions about the disposition of our property is hardly an end of the world decision and need not be made quickly or without regard for our future, especially God's vision for us.

Today's discourse in Mark is considered the “little apocalypse” in the Bible. The Greek root of apocalypse means to uncover or reveal, so what do today's apocalyptic

reading reveal to us? We are not being subjected to undue pressure, however anxious Jim and I and the Vestry are. Surely not on the scale that the Jews were suffering horrible persecution throughout the lands when most apocalyptic prophecies were made.

The Gospel of Mark was written during or just at the end of the Jewish-Roman war. So it is not surprising that in Mark's time there were quite a lot of apocalyptic stories. Jews and Christians alike saw the war as the end of an age. But the war of Jewish revolt against Rome (66 – 70) was not the end. In today's reading, Jesus warned of false prophets who might lead his faithful four and all his followers (and us) astray. Mark tells his 1st century readers (and us) that wars and famines and earthquakes of his time are not the end as the false prophets claimed.

Peter, James, John, and Andrew were with Jesus at the Temple to hear the Jewish hyperbole we heard today in the Gospel. Yes, Jesus was deliberately exaggerating. That would have been obvious to his 1st century hearers, to Peter and James, to John and Andrew. Prophetic apocalyptic language was the manner of speech for the sages in the Jewish community, and Jesus spoke as many Jewish prophets did.

Jesus visited Jerusalem only once in the Gospel according to Mark, so in today's account, we hear that the disciples see the Temple for the first time. It was a magnificent structure. Pilgrims and tourists still can see some of the huge stones of its foundation.

Herod the Great had begun his rebuilding of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem around 20 BC. Construction would not be finished until the year 63 – some 30 years after Jesus's death. And the 2nd Temple was destroyed 7 years later. So when Jesus first took the disciples to Jerusalem it was approximately the mid point of the great construction. The stones that Jesus speaks of were indeed large, 35 feet by 18 feet by 12 feet. To say that the Temple complex was massive is a gross understatement. Yet Jesus predicts that the entire place will be destroyed. The historian Josephus reported a prophetic figure who spoke of the demise of the city of Jerusalem in the years before the outbreak of the

Jewish rebellions against Rome. Other prophets had made similar predictions about the First temple.

The destruction of the 1st temple in Jerusalem and later the fall of the 2nd Temple were true turning points in the faith of Jews and Christians. How Jews and Christians lived out what they believed was tied to a particular place for many centuries. And since the destruction of the 2nd Temple, Jews have prayed for the 3rd Temple – a yet unrealized place of worship.

Is faith tied to a place, to a particular location? Is our faith in God through his son Jesus the Christ dependent upon where that faith resides? We believe that Jesus spoke of the temple as his body, and also as the body of Christians, individually and corporately. We, the church are the body of Christ with Christ himself as the head of the church. Jesus himself was and is the new Temple. But for the writer and first readers of Mark, the Temple was not just a metaphor. God was housed in THE temple in Jerusalem, and that Temple was to be a house of prayer for all people. But as the modern Biblical scholar and theologian N. T. Wright has said – in our day this must be achieved through the new temple which is Jesus himself and his people.²

Jesus IS the new temple. So our faith need not be tied to a place, not the temple in Jerusalem nor St. Andrew's By-the-Sea here in Destin. When Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit, we were called to take Christ to the world. Anywhere – no, everywhere – we are – we are to bring Christ to the world.

We modern people demand that our experts give us predictions of the future. And there are plenty of pundits who are happy to offer their opinions – modern day prophets, if you will. And we want to know right now what our future is here in this place! Peter, James, John, and Andrew wanted to know when the Temple would come down! “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” To the people of Mark's time – after their temple Jesus had died and was resurrected – people who believed that Jesus would return soon, thought that his return

was really eminent. So the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem was a sign to them; the fall of the Temple, as Mark's apocalyptic message revealed, was a sign that the end times were upon them – the end time event that would usher in Jesus's second coming.

As you all know Jim and I are movie buffs. I recall a question posed in a little movie called *New in Town*. When asked "Have you found Jesus?" the new girl in town quipped "I didn't know he was missing."

What do the end times that Mark speaks of mean to us? Surely it is not the end of St. Andrew's By-the-Sea located right here on the main highway in Destin? Or are the "End Times" for us accepting that it is Jesus we seek and not an address but a place in our hearts? Where might we find Jesus? Has he gone missing in our lives? Who might we turn to when we are looking for him? Some 21st century prophet perhaps? Listen to the words of a fictitious 1st century prophet:

1. Man you should have seen me way back then
I could tell a tale ; I could make it spin
I could tell you black was white ;
 I could tell you day was night
Not only that I could tell you why
Back then I could really tell a lie

2. Well I'd hire a kid to say he was lame
Then I'd touch him and make him walk again
Then I'd pull some magic trick
 I'd pretend to heal the sick
I was takin' everything they had to give
It wasn't all that bad a way to live

3. Well I'm in this desert town and it's hot as hell
But no one's buyin' what I got to sell
I make my lame kid walk
 I make a dumb guy talk
I'm preachin' up a storm both night and day
But everyone just turns and walks away

4. Well I can see that I'm only wasting time
So I head across the road to drink some wine
This old man comes up to me ;
 He says I've seen you on the street

You're pretty good if I do say myself
But the guy that come thru here last month
he was somethin' else

5. Instead of callin' out for fire from above
He just gets real quiet and talks about love
And I'll tell you somethin' funny
He didn't want nobody's money
Now I'm not exactly sure what this all means
But it's the damndest thing
I swear I've ever seen

6. Well since that time every town is the same
I can't make a dime, I don't know why I came
I decide I'll go and find him;
And find out who's behind him
He has everyone convinced that he's for real
Well I figure we can work us out a deal

7. So he offers me a job and I say fine
He says I'll get paid off on down the line
Well I guess I'll string along ;
Don't see how too much can go wrong
As long as he pays my way I guess I'll follow
We're headed for Jerusalem tomorrow

Jerusalem Tomorrow

Words and music: David Olney

Performer: Emmylou Harris

Album: Cowgirl's Prayer

If we were heading to Jerusalem tomorrow would we find the one we seek? We are about to enter into a new church year, a time of preparation for finding Christ anew. Will we find him? Where will we find him? Here at St. Andrew's? Down the street? Will we be prepared? Will we be equipped to take him to the world?

Lord, help us to know! Amen.

¹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/68-magnitude-earthquake-hits-cuba-crisis-without-parallel.html>

² N. T. Wright, *Jerusalem in the New Testament* (1994)].