



Twenty-fourth Sunday a. Pentecost
15 November AD 2009, Proper 28 B

Hebrews 10:11-25, Mark 13:1-13

Commercial: It's hard to believe that next Sunday is Christ the King. That means today is the last Sunday of the Church year; for you it means Thanksgiving is nipping at our heels and you need to visit the ladies after service this week or next to get your gift cards because many of you will be hosting thanksgiving, or if you're invited to someone's home you'll want to bring a cake or pie.

We're at that point in our read through HEBREWS where Jesus is now greater than "God's house," the Temple. We've read how he has been superior in every way to Moses, the priests and the prophets. Today's reading focuses on Christ's superiority to *the holy place, the curtain and the Day*—that great and awful (awesome) day; the day when the Kingdom of God is "accomplished, fulfilled, complete."

It's in the air; it's a *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times. A film that is scheduled for release soon features an apocalyptic earthquake and the collapse of great buildings in the USA, the Vatican, and the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio, Brazil, and several other monuments. It makes for a great thrill. But if you've been watching the on-air commentary, you've heard the criticism; the director and producer deliberately decided not to feature the destruction of any Muslim sites.

In the old system of readings I had three weeks of end-time lessons which led to the warnings of John the Baptist at the beginning of Advent. It now sneaks up on us without much warning. Just last week however, someone asked me about "the end times;" and he was the second since early in October. Do you think it might have something to do with the political atmosphere? —the economy? —the war? —the sweeping cultural changes? Or, is just the new TV season? The show, *V* features a friendly invasion of planet earth by aliens. People are wondering, 'how bad will things get?'

I don't think *They* were expecting Jesus' comments. Perhaps the disciple was thinking aloud when he commented on the magnificence of the Temple. Herod's Temple was quite unlike the preceding work of kings Solomon and Zerubabel. Herod finished off the exterior in marble and trimmed it with gold. In the morning, the sunlight must have made it glorious, like a wonder of the world. It is not surprising that the disciples are amazed by its beauty; they talked about it in Rome.

"Do you see these great buildings?" Jesus responded. "Not one stone will be left

upon another.” The words sound treasonous, don’t they? The reconstruction of the Temple began around 19 BC, and continued throughout the life of our Lord. Work on the complex came to an end long after Herod the Great, about AD 64, just six or seven years before it was burned by the Romans, when they smashed Jerusalem.

“Treasonous?” Maybe I was a little harsh. Jesus isn’t speaking against the Temple of the Lord, but he means to say, “don’t put your faith in the buildings, or temples of stone.” Later that day, they ascend the Mt. of Olives. From where this teaching takes place, the great Temple can be seen in the distance; we know what’s on the apostles’ mind. “*When* will the end take place and *what* is the sign that all things have been accomplished.” Not ‘when will it happen?’ But when will it all be finished, fulfilled, complete?

The prophets had spoken of a day, a great and terrible day. On *that day* the nations will gather around Jerusalem in opposition to the LORD GOD himself. The messiah will fight for them from the Mt. of Olives, where they are now sitting. The prophecy from Zechariah 14 is not pretty. In the end “when IT was accomplished” God will be victorious, from the city will flow a river of living water, and the Lord will reign as king over Judah forever, the nations paying him homage. The last verse promises “in that day merchants will no longer trade in the house of the Lord.” (Living water, Jesus claimed to be its source. Earlier in the week Jesus had chased the merchants out of God’s house.)

From the vantage point of history, what was predicted has in many respects already come to pass. Jerusalem and its fabled Temple have been devastated: silent stones speak volumes still. In the fourth century the great Church of the Holy Sepulcher was built over Jesus’ tomb by Constantine. The dome of that church looked across a vacant hilltop to the Mt. of Olives. The Temple mount was left as vacant land, some say left as a sign of the triumph of Christianity. Several hundred years later the Muslims would erect their shrine, the Dome of the Rock there—an abomination on the site of God’s holy place! Some thought it was the end of the world.

Yes indeed, last week I was asked about the end, for the second time in as many months. It’s not as if I don’t take the Word of Lord seriously, I do. But of equal weight are the sayings of Jesus which tell me in effect, ‘I can’t possibly know *that day* in advance. So don’t worry about it.’ But we are curious—it’s human nature.

There’s another new program FLASH FORWARD. Unconscious people all around the world have been given visions of their own personal future. If television shows are any kind of a barometer for our culture, then I can tell you that people are wondering about the future—their future. What would you differently if you knew about

you own ending— that it was immanent?

Everything about my faith, and everything I hold dear and know of Jesus tells me to lift up my head and look for my redemption. Beautiful buildings and institutions may be useful to us, but nothing remains forever. Nothing that is but the Kingdom of God. Everything in this life serves God's purposes—even that Muslim shrine! God is in control; history is in his hands. Everything in the gospel suggests that our lives and our witness to God and Christ must continue actively right up to the end, to that great day when Jesus returns in glory, seated at his Father's right hand.

The great Temple served its purpose. It's gone now. But you are not gone yet; how do you serve God? How do you with your life point to the day when the Kingdom of God will be accomplished, completed? What do you pray for, when you say, "thy Kingdom come?" O Lord, let it begin with me.

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