

The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. Mary S. Trainor
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, Wisconsin
November 17, 2024

Texts: Daniel 12:1-3, Psalm 16, Hebrews 10:11-14, Mark 13:1-8

In our Gospel today, Jesus and the disciples are on the Mount of Olives looking down at the temple. The enormous temple, built by Herod the Great, was the the focal point of the Jewish faith, and where they believed God entered the world. The gold embellished marble stones used to build the temple were each the size of a house, weighing tons. The temple could be seen from miles away. People thought of the temple as indestructible. The disciples, country boys from Galilee, were blown away when they saw it! Yet, Jesus said, *“Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”* Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in AD 70, and Jesus prophesied this! Can you imagine the disciples hearing this news, that their source of strength and identity was going to be totally destroyed? What a shock! Jesus calms them, continuing with this advice: *“do not be alarmed.”* God is sure and steady, unchanging, always present no matter what. We can rely on God's presence through uncertainty, disappointment, grief, and bitterness in our lives; even when the rug gets totally pulled out from under us-God is here.

The Gospel ends with this sentence: *“This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.”* A birthpang is labor pain before giving birth; in this context it refers to: “the hardships and difficulties accompanying a major change.” We too, in this post-election time, are on the edge of major change. We don't like change. Social science research shows that many of us do not adapt well to change. Author and educator Elizabeth Lesser said, “How strange that the nature of life is change, yet the nature of human beings is to resist change.” With anticipation of upcoming changes, there is anxiety in our midst that cuts across politics. Writer Margaret Renkl wrote an op-ed in the NY Times last week about her plan for this time of change; she called it her “Panic Abatement Plan.” Her plan includes spending time in the woods, bookstores, puppies, lunch with friends, thank you notes. These actions are excellent, and they will help abate her panic...but they are temporary, like the temple was temporary. We need something lasting to help us adapt to difficult times of change, and that is God. Why did you come to church today? A petition in our service of Evening Prayer (BCP page 128) is: “O God, make speed to save us.” And the people respond: “O Lord, make haste to help us.” Let's face it, most of us came to church to get some help. Recently someone said to me, “When I come into this church I can exhale.” Our presence here is an admission that we are needful of God's help, to get through changes of these times. Psalm 62 tells us, *God is our rock and our salvation*. 1 John 4:8 tells us, *“God is love.”* To truly survive major change, we followers of Christ move forward in love, with love, as love. If we do, as the prophet Daniel said in our OT reading this morning, we shall *“shine like the brightness of the sky...like the stars forever and ever.”* As our Psalmist this morning tells us, *“I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand I shall not fall....in your presence there is fullness of joy.”* God is sure and steady, unchanging. God's love is real, and as we live into it we shall shine, we shall be full of joy regardless.

Our faith is not dependent upon this St. Mark's building, but here in this building, we aid each other in becoming grounded in the everlasting symbiosis is experienced. Symbiosis is a close relationship, a connection. We can learn a lot about symbiosis from plants. In our woods, lichens are amazing dual organisms (algae and fungi) found on bark. In the soil, tree roots weave together to help each other stand in high winds, and trees are able to thrive because of essential bacteria and fungi woven within their root cells.

In today's Epistle reading we heard, "*Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together...encouraging one another.*" A symbol of how you here at St Mark's live out this passage, provoking one another to love – meeting together- encouraging one another (symbiotic), is how you meet in the back after the service and how you will meet in the new parish hall. Here is a place of invitation, of welcoming, of sharing stories over food, of networking, of acceptance and relaxation: a home away from home. God weaves us (the body of Christ) together in a matrix of strength that will withstand political and social changes. When we are symbiosis with God and each other, filled with God's love, people will notice and want to be here. In this time of change, each day make a symbiotic connection, a concrete gestures of love, with someone new. Ubuntu (*oo-boon-too*) is an African word that is about symbiotic relationships, relationships in which the inner worth of every human being is recognized. Desmond Tutu said, "people with "ubuntu" are open and available to others, affirming of others, for they have a proper self assurance that they belong to a greater whole." You belong to a greater whole as a follower of Jesus Christ here at St. Mark's.

Civil rights leader and US Representative John Lewis, lived out his faith with self-controlled love, relying on God, in spite of the beatings he received. He said this: "We are talking about *love* here... broader, deeper, all-encompassing love. It is love that accepts and embraces the hateful and the hurtful. It is love that recognizes the spark of the divine in each one of us, even those who... we might call our enemy. I'm not going to become bitter. I'm going to treat my fellow human being as a human being. .. and love each other." You have a purpose, and it is love. God is sure and steady, unchanging, always present. Each day make a symbiotic connection, gestures of love, with someone new. It will make you shine like the stars and give you fullness of joy. Ubuntu.

I will end this sermon time with a recent prayer written by Bishop Deon Johnson of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri:

"Holy Immortal God. This time is too bleak and too brilliant for anything else but love. This time is too dangerous and too delicate, for anything else but love. This time is too terrible and too terrific, for anything else but love. This time is too vicious and too vibrant for anything else but love. This time is too brutal and too beautiful, for anything else but love. Bless us in the difficulty and delight of this time with love. Amen."