

**Year B, Pentecost 25, between November 13 and 19 inclusive**

**November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

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**Mark 13:1-8**

### **We Must All Speak for the Scapegoat Now**

When Jesus and his disciples left the Temple, “one of his disciples said to him, ‘Teacher, look! What awesome stones and buildings!’” The building was a magnificent architectural structure containing huge stones, cut to fit, that elicited awe and a sense of national pride. The Temple was the crown jewel of Jewish culture, the rallying point for their ambition to be self-governing and free of Rome. For years zealous groups had organized in defense of Jewish culture and been crushed by the Roman military. But they continued, each group more determined than the last until Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.

While in the Temple, Jesus had gathered his disciples and in the story of the Widow’s mite explained the economic relationship between poverty, exploitation and the flaunting of the powerful, but it’s doubtful the disciples got it. Now, in walking out of the Temple, a disciple points to the extravagant building the widow’s mite had paid for (taxes were very heavy) and Jesus is not impressed.

“Do you see these enormous buildings? Not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished.” In our imaginations, buildings in all their grandeur, fall like a scene from one of those apocalyptic movies. Complete devastation! Incomprehensible destruction! What did Jesus mean? Why did he say this?

They move across the Kedron Valley to the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple, the awful image lingering in their minds. Now, Jesus is describing what will happen in the future if his people continue to use violence as a means of social change. But the disciples bring a complex set of theological meanings to it and think he’s describing the end of the world. Jesus isn’t thinking theology (what God will do), he is thinking history and anthropology (what humans do). Jesus and his disciples are on very different wave lengths. Jesus doesn’t believe all this God-is-violent-stuff but how does he get his disciples to see that humans are the dangerous ones, not God?

“Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen? What sign will show that all these things are about to come to an end?’” They are thinking of a bloody and violent end of the world scenario brought on by God and their heads spin with images of destruction while their bodies tighten with anxiety.

I wonder why these four don’t discuss this openly in the presence of the other disciples. Do they want special knowledge that gives them an advantage? We have Peter and Andrew, James and John, two sets of brothers, attempting to conspire with Jesus while leaving the other disciples out. The group’s unity is splintering. The talk of Temple destruction has made them all anxious and they form coalitions for self-protection. Anxious systems do this.

The four disciples pump each other's fears making them vulnerable to being deceived by anyone promising easy solutions. Does this remind you of our political process right now? Who can best persuade us that they can give us most of what we want while costing us as little as possible. That one gets our vote.

Jesus, aware of their vulnerability says, "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many people will come in my name, saying, 'I'm the one!' They will deceive many people." When almost everyone is anxious, someone will exploit this by offering themselves as the savior. Don't listen to them. They will manipulate your fear to serve their own ends and everyone will be the worse for it.

Do we need to be reminded of how Hitler exploited the fears, vulnerability and narcissistic rage of the German People? His solution was to siphon all that feeling into the Jews and the Holocaust was the result. Could we do it again with our illegal immigrants, for example? Maybe we should round them up and send them back to Mexico. That would cause our problems to go away with them, right?! "Watch out that no one deceives you. They will deceive many."

Jesus goes on, "When you hear of wars and reports of wars, don't be alarmed." Is he kidding? There are bombings in Paris, shootings in Israel and violence on the Streets of Portland but don't be alarmed? "These things must happen," he says. He seems to say, you know it's going to happen because it's what humans do to each other in their rivalry. It's not out of the ordinary. And then he continues, "But this isn't the end yet." What is he talking about?

When Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple the disciples got alarmed. They saw it as the end of the world. They experienced it as a judgement from God. In their imaginations God's wrath pours down upon them and nothing gets spared. But Jesus doesn't believe in God's wrath. He knows their fears are all projections of human wrath.

Jesus knows the destruction of the Temple didn't have anything to do with God and never would because God doesn't use wrath. And when we think God does use wrath and we are his administrators, we open ourselves to all kinds of violence, deception and exploitation. Wars and reports of wars are a human thing and God has no part in it. What is happening in the world is not a cosmic struggle between good and evil. It's humans in rivalry.

Yes, the Temple did get destroyed and it was horrible. For the Jews it was earth shattering. It happened because the Jews kept defying Rome until Rome lost patience and utterly destroyed Jerusalem as an example to the rest of the world. But God didn't do it. In fact, Jesus saw it coming and hoped his teaching and example would prevent it.

Jesus hopes to remove their fears of earth-shattering, God-sponsored destruction in order to teach them the real causes of violence, war and famine. These things are human caused and preventable. Yes, these wars must happen because humans haven't learned how to manage their rivalry and see themselves as all loved children. Meanwhile, the Gospel is flowing into the world and eroding the divisions humans have used to siphon off tensions. Without these

divisions we don't know how to live and it makes us anxious and we splinter all the more. It is a stage we must go through on our journey toward the end.

"Nations and kingdoms will fight against each other, and there will be earthquakes and famines in all sorts of places." Earthquakes are geological events requiring we help each other and famines call us to share food, but there is no cosmic significance to these events, no divine punishment implied. It's all mundane, common and tragic.

Did any of you watch PBS on Tuesday evening, the night before Veteran's Day? The first show that struck me was entitled "Iwo Jima: From Combat to Comrades." Japanese and American veterans from both sides met at Iwo Jima and we saw their common humanity as each side remembered with tears the friends they had lost there. The program after this was entitled "Debt of Honor: Disabled Veterans in American History." The mental and physical cost of war, often hidden by popular sentiment and government decree, was powerfully revealed in interviews and video footage. We are seeing what we do to each other. The hidden victim is being exposed and it's happening on television. We are seeing the scapegoat and often we know them. Sometimes they are our children, grandchildren or friends.

With the light of the gospel leading us, the human species must learn to see what before we were blind to; that we are more alike than we had ever dreamed. The gospel is teaching us that the West is not better than the East nor vice versa; that white is not better than black, nor vice versa; that one sexual orientation not superior to another nor vice versa. But if there are no dualities, with one being better and the other being worse, how do we define ourselves? We might have to learn to live by grace and forgiveness and let go of all those comparative categories.

When the gospels teach us we are all children of God, loved and in need of mercy, it undermines the world's order. It does so to bring this world's order to an end. But the end is not what we think. In the gospels the end is the beginning of the Kingdom Jesus promised where there are no tears, sorrow, suffering and death. That's an end I can look forward to and nothing to be feared.

This week many of us continue to remember Rene Girard. David Hayward, a Facebook friend, expressed his tribute to René Girard with a picture depicting a goat marked with an "x" tied to a stake in the desert. A bubble over the solitary goat reads "Good Bye, Rene Girard." The lone scapegoat in the desert mourns Girard, who spoke for him. With Rene gone we must all speak for the scapegoat now, until the world learns to live without them. Amen.