

WHEN TEMPLES ARE THROWN DOWN

What do you do when it seems that everything around you is falling apart? Well, Jesus has a good word for us today. I want to share that word with you, but first I need to tell you a little about the text and give you some background information.

Jesus and his followers had just left the Temple, when one of the disciples turned around and was completely awed by the grandeur and size of the Temple. He was walking next to Jesus, and without really thinking, he nudged Jesus and said, "Rabbi, look at those huge stones and magnificent buildings." Jesus stopped and pointed to the Temple. "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down."

The Temple in Jerusalem which Herod built was one the wonders of the world. It was built on the top of Mount Moriah. Instead of leveling off the top of the mountain, a kind of vast platform was formed by raising up walls of massive masonry and so enclosing the whole area. Some of these stones were 40 feet long, by 12 feet high, by 18 feet wide.

The most magnificent entrance to the Temple was at the south-west angle. There was a valley between the Temple and the city and a bridge spanned the valley. Each arch was 41 feet high. The valley was 354 feet across and the valley floor was 225 feet below. The bridge itself was 50 foot wide. The bridge led into the Royal Porch. The porch consisted of a double row of Corinthian pillars, all 37 feet high and each one of them cut out of a solid block of marble.

The front of the Temple was covered with plates of gold, and, when the early morning sun hit the gold plates, the Temple shown with such a fiery splendor that it was blinding.

The Temple was one of the finest expressions of human art and achievement in that day, and it seemed so vast and solid that it would stand forever. In addition, the Temple was the center of Jewish life. The Temple was a sacred place and represented the Presence of God. Even though this building was new, the Temple as an institution had been around since the time of Solomon, a thousand years before the time of Jesus.

No wonder the disciples were shocked when Jesus said the Temple would be destroyed and that not one stone would be left upon another. A building of such magnitude and beauty, an institution of such history and sacredness - the disciples thought it would last forever.

You know, we can fall into the same trap as the disciples. We can start thinking that our temples, our structures, our institutions are solid and secure and will last - forever.

Not long ago, many thought our economy was solid and secure. We thought we had learned the lessons of the Great Depression and had fashioned an economy that was depression-proof. A year ago we learned that even the best economy in the world can come crashing down.

We may look at other institutions and think they are strong and secure - that nothing can bring them down. Our government. Our educational system. Our security systems. Our military. Our health care system. We may even think that about the church. Or our families.

I have talked to people who thought their marriages were solid and that they had good, strong families. And then something came along, and it all fell apart.

I don't think Jesus is trying to scare us with this reading. But he is a realist. And he is warning us not to get too comfortable in our human structures and institutions. There will be wars and earthquakes and famines, he said. All kinds of things can happen and will happen. And then that which seems so strong and secure comes tumbling down.

But even more, Jesus is warning us not to put our trust in the things we that we humans build, no matter how sturdy and splendid they may seem. Rather, we are to put our trust in God.

Jesus said to his first disciples, and he says the same thing to us, "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead people astray." We are constantly tempted to put our trust in all kinds of things and believe that they will protect us, that they will defend us from calamity, that they will save us.

But there is only one Christ. There is only one Savior. There is only One who suffered and died for you and me. There is only one who defeated the power of death and destruction and rose on Easter morning. And that is Jesus.

It is Jesus who said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Mark 13:31) It is Jesus who said, "Do not fear, only believe." (Mark 5:36) It is Jesus who said, "The one who endures to the end will be saved." (Mark 13:13)

Jesus shed his blood and so has become our great high priest. He has opened the way for us to come into the presence of God. Jesus makes it possible for us to live confidently, even when everything around us is falling apart. Jesus is faithful. Jesus is reliable. Nothing will throw him down. Nothing will destroy him. He is the strong one who enables you to endure to the end.

So let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering. Let us do, as the Bible reading for today says. Let us live in confidence. Let us love one another. Let us encourage one another. All the while - keeping our eyes on Jesus.