

# “Hope in God”

Mark 13:1-8; Psalm 16

*Pastor James York*

Pastor Carter tells of two elders calling on an inactive member. He recited a litany of the world’s problems before concluding, “Listen, the world is falling apart, and the church can’t do a thing about it...I don’t go to church any more. The church has nothing to say.” “In many ways,” Carter says, “the world really is falling apart, just as it was when Jesus told his disciples that the temple would be destroyed and they would face wars, earthquakes and famines.”

Jesus foretold that the world will continue to fall apart even for the most faithful disciples. In the midst of all this, though, Jesus gives his disciples and us a command to do something. We are to have hope in God. We are to proclaim the Good News to ourselves, each other and the world as everything but God falls apart. For the Good News is God’s love, and that supremely powerful. God is going to win. Death and hate in every form is being conquered. Abundant life and love will prevail for eternity. The temple, religion, politics, nations, progress, science, will at times all fail. God will never fail. God is and will restore, heal, forgive, redeem and resurrect.

Our gospel lesson today is called apocalyptic scripture. Jack Hardaway wrote, “The truth about apocalyptic scriptures is they are about hope. Hope for those for whom everything has fallen apart, whose old life has ended, who are looking for hope to go on. Hope for those experiencing war, injustice, disaster, refugees, lost, rootless, homeless, death, illness, betrayal—all the things that come and send us running for the hills just to survive. When the earth, when human society, just can’t take any more abuse and things start falling apart. When the waters of chaos flood and devour all that live. We are given a vision of God pushing back the flood, and starting life anew, of cutting those days short. It is about hope, healing, faith and trust; an open-ended mystery for all those at the end of their rope, at the end of their lives. To read, Mark, learn and inwardly digest apocalyptic scripture, is to hope in God, who alone can make it right. To embrace and ever hold fast the blessing of everlasting life, which has been given to us, given in our Savior Jesus Christ, is to have a heart like God’s for all those who have been left out in the cold. It is to be like the Grinch who stole Christmas, whose heart suddenly grew to the point of bursting, bursting to be a life that brings gifts to others, not destruction; blessing, not curse. To truly be reminded by these apocalyptic lessons is to pray like Mother Teresa when she asked God to “break my heart so completely that the whole world falls in.” God is beautiful and brings hope, light, and thanksgiving. May our hearts be so completely broken that the whole world falls in. That no one is left behind.”

Progress, institutions, governments, and religions all clamor for us to place our hope in them. Granted all of them can do wonderful things. Our work for them often

makes life better, however all of them at times will fail us, that is why Jesus is urging his disciples to place their hope in God.

The disciples were in awe as they gazed upon the temple. A historian wrote. “The exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye.” The temple walls were covered with gold so as soon as the sun shone it radiated such a fiery flash that you had to avert your eyes. It was so massive with a roof of purest white that from a distance it appeared like a snow capped mountain. The temple had individual stones 40 feet, by 12 feet by 18 feet that’s the size of a tiny house. The temple was, at that time, one of, if not, the greatest accomplishment of humankind.

The gospel of Mark proclaims. **Mark 13:1-8 As Jesus was leaving the Temple that day, one of his disciples said, “Teacher, look at these magnificent buildings! Look at the impressive stones in the walls.” Jesus replied, “Yes, look at these great buildings. But they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!”** Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives across the valley from the Temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him privately and asked Jesus, “Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to be fulfilled?” Jesus replied, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah.’ They will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won’t follow immediately. Nation will go to war against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in many parts of the world, as well as famines. But this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come.

We are to place our hope in God and not be lead astray. Some people put their hope in the unsinkable titanic. Some people put their hope in government and our monuments. The Washington Monument is the largest all stone structure in the world. The sinking of the titanic, the cracks in the Washington Monument from last year’s earthquake, the best of what we build, be it a ship, monument, temple, house, reputation, business, portfolio are all temporary and will fall apart. God, love, joy, are eternal.

In his book *Margin* Dr. Richard Swenson said today many are exhausted because they have misplaced their hope in progress. If you value gaining wealth even if it means neglecting a relationship or value improving your house even if it means injuring your psyche, or value a promotion even if it means eroding your spiritual integrity then you have misplaced your hope in progress instead of God. If you are driven to work, be perfect, or look a certain way to feel like you belong then your hope is in progress rather than God. In contrast hope assures us that we all belong to God by God’s grace. If you are striving to prove yourself by controlling your body, controlling your emotions, controlling your surroundings, controlling other people then your hope is in progress. If you strive tirelessly—working, acquiring, consuming, achieving, e-mailing, over-committing and rushing in a never ending quest to prove yourself then your hope is in

progress. In contrast hope in God assures us that God will perfect us. We enjoy God's blessings by grace not by works. Hope in God shifts our perspective. Things do not own us and are not very important. Jobs are merely jobs, cars are hunks of rusting metal, houses will fall down, the world will be ravaged by natural disasters but love, relationships with others and God is supreme and eternal.

Sometimes we put our hope in our perception of God. We build a temple for God and box God in, limiting God to only love, forgive, act, work and redeem in the ways we believe God should or by the way we perceive scripture. We secretly want God to do our bidding, make things go our way, keep us safe. Jesus said the temple and the box we make for God will come crashing down. Life will happen in unexpected ways. God will do things that surprise us.

In the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm we praise God for being our shepherd for renewing us by still waters yet God also takes us through, not around, the valley of the shadow of death, a valley of misfortune, disease, hardship, suffering, disaster, earthquakes, war, famine, falling buildings. Hope gets us through for God is always with us and ultimately goodness and mercy will follow us and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Mary Anderson writes. "Jesus reminds us that we are not ultimately invested in this world, and Jesus liberates us to live with hope, tall towers of hope. Hope calls for a lightning-speed reordering of priorities, for alertness, sharpness, expectation. These are times of uncertainty and fear only for those whose faith is thin. As Jesus said, you will hear of wars, earthquakes and famines, but it doesn't mean the end is near. You will hear of the comings and goings of institutions and cultures, but it doesn't mean the end is near. It may only be the beginning of what God has planned, a powerful time, pregnant with purpose for those with ears to hear and eyes to see hope, the advent of our God."

Psalm 16 is a prayer that reveals the hope in God of the psalmist. **Psalm 16 Keep me safe, O God, for I have come to you for refuge. I said to the Lord, "You are my Master! Every good thing I have comes from you." The godly people in the land are my true heroes! I take pleasure in them! Troubles multiply for those who chase after other gods. I will not take part in their sacrifices of blood or even speak the names of their gods. Lord, you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing. You guard all that is mine. The land you have given me is a pleasant land. What a wonderful inheritance! I will bless the Lord who guides me; even at night my heart instructs me. I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for God is right beside me. No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety. For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your holy one to rot in the grave. You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.**

Daniel Miglior said. "God is a promising power who keeps history on the move toward new horizons. God shatters the old and commences the new, ever creating fresh

openings for genuine human community, of righteousness and love. Jesus opens history to surprising possibilities." Proclaiming the resurrection fills us with hope.

Jesus Christ is risen and eternal. God is with you. God loves you. Joy and love are eternal. God is all powerful. God will get you through every challenge to abundant eternal life. Have hope in God. Amen