

17 November 2024

Sermon by Isaac De Jongh.

The Lord be with you.

May I speak to you in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost.

The themes for today:

Do not be alarmed! Making all things new.

Readings:

1 Samuel 1: 4-20; 1 Samuel 2: 1-10; Hebrews 10: 11-14, (15-18) 19 -25 and Mark 13: 1-8.

1 Samuel 1: 4-20

The reading describes how Samuel the prophet came to be born. His mother Hannah was barren and mocked by her husband's other wife, who had many children. During a family feast at Shiloh, Hannah prayed out of her deep despair. She vowed to give her son back to God if He would allow her to conceive.

Twice in the Bible people who are praying are mistaken for being drunk. Hannah on the threshold of the Temple of Shiloh is praying for a son and is rebuked by Eli. "Put away your wine," he says. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles are filled with the power of the holy spirit, and they begin to speak in many languages. Those around them marvel that at 9 o'clock in the morning they are already drunk.

Hannah is praying for a child. She's praying from the very depths of her longing. Standing there only steps away from the Ark of the Covenant was no time for thee's and thou's. No time for unnatural awkwardness, and fake formality.

Psalm – 1 Samuel 2: 1-10

This song is Hannah's testimony, not only of what God has done in her life but of how God operates in all of life. And so, it can be an encouragement to us.

God's power is demonstrated in Hannah's prayer, which looks forward to the time when a king will rule Israel. The prayer's final sentence, "The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will

give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed" (1 Samuel 2:10), is a messianic prophecy.

Hannah's prayer demonstrates her faith through obedience, even when it means an extreme personal sacrifice. She pours out her soul in grief and great anguish, and leaves in peace. God answers prayer, and he hears us when we call to him in our time of deepest longing.

Hebrews 10: 11-14, (15-18) 19-25

This section of the Bible encourages Christians to live out their faith with confidence and courage. It calls for a new way of worshiping God, where believers can access God directly through their faith in Jesus, without the need for a priest.

Jesus' sacrifice opened a new way for believers to be obedient to the messiah's death and resurrection. The body of Christ is a mysterious reference to the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. It symbolizes that believers have direct access to God's presence.

Once believers accept that Christ has redeemed them from sin and granted them access to God's throne room, they should feel confident enough to enter God's presence. Christ's act of opening the doors to the sanctuary is a community-forming act. It's an invitation to gather around the cross and encourage each other to love and do good deeds. This is why we are called the body of Christ – the church.

Mark 13: 1-8

Do not be alarmed. That's the first thing we have to say about today's gospel. And it's the same thing Jesus told the disciples. "Do not be alarmed." Do not be disturbed or troubled by all these things. Do not be frightened.

Jesus is telling the disciples that he's not talking about an ending but about a beginning, the birthing of new life. He's describing a movement toward wholeness, fullness, and completion.

The theme of today's Gospel is "making all things new." And I think it's exactly what we need to hear these days when it looks as if so, many things are coming apart. Today's gospel overflows with good news. And yes, it's difficult and challenging but it's worth all our attention and effort.

It's a gospel about hope. It's a gospel about opportunities and possibilities. It's a gospel about finding meaning and new life. It's a gospel about your future and my future. And who among doesn't sometimes wonder, worry, or even become alarmed about our future and the future of the world?

We are called to live in the present moment and not become alarmed about the future and to focus on the unknown and a time yet to come. Are we really more focused on the known and the present time. Do we want to know if the temples we have built will withstand the test of time. Will the center hold? Will my relationships endure? Will my acquisitions and accomplishments continue to give identity, meaning, and security? Will the systems I've created for my life, wellbeing, and happiness remain intact? Are the foundations of my life stable and strong enough to last?

In other words, I'm focused on the large stones and large buildings of my life. So, when I hear Jesus say, "Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down," I get a bit twitchy. Maybe you do too. Jesus says the very things that I am most focused on are coming down. I can't help but wonder if I've missed the point and been distracted from what really matters, from the new life that is waiting and wanting to be birthed through me.

Maybe that's what is going on with the disciple who says to Jesus, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Maybe he's missed the point and distracted himself from what really matters and is calling for attention.

This surely wasn't the first time this disciple, an adult Jewish man, had been to or seen the temple. He had probably grown up going to the temple. He'd gone to the temple with Jesus at least twice before this day (Mark 11:11,15). The large stones and buildings of the temple were not new to him. He'd seen it all before.

There's a disconnect between what he says and what has just happened. Jesus and his disciples have just left the temple where they sat opposite the treasury watching the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums but a poor widow put in one penny, all that she had. Jesus says to his disciples, "Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury." (Mark 12:41-44) With those words Jesus has cracked the mortar between the stones of power, wealth, prestige, reputation, position, and security. A separation has begun.

Jesus holds up the widow as an example. She's probably not the example the disciples or we would hold up. She has no wealth, power, position, or security. She's the one we often overlook, ignore, and sometimes abuse. And the first thing, the only thing, any disciple says is, "Wow! Look how big that building is." They don't get it. Maybe we don't either.

I wonder if this disciple is trying to change the subject and distract himself from what Jesus has just said. Haven't you done that? We change the subject or distract ourselves so we don't have to deal with the vulnerable, painful, or broken parts of our lives. I wonder if he's looking at the large stones and buildings so he doesn't have to look at himself in light of the widow. I wonder if he's feeling the large stones and buildings of his life beginning to shift and separate.

I feel my temple coming down when preparing and planning somethings that does not materialize. I feel it when a loved one dies. I feel it every time I tell myself a lie rather than face

the truth about myself. I feel it when the values I claim for myself are not the values I speak or live. It happens when I use my accomplishments to avoid facing how I need to change. It's all those times I look at what's happening outside of me instead of what's happening inside of me. It's there whenever I refuse to see, acknowledge, and receive the widow and her way of life in my life.

You know as well as I do that's a difficult and uncomfortable place to be, and we've all been there. Jesus says it looks and sounds like war and rumors of war. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes and famines.

What does Jesus tell them? He does something unique. He begins by giving them some signs to ignore regarding the destruction of the Temple and His second coming. He gives them some false signs that many believers will see and experience and think the Lord's return is close, but it's not. He told them about tragedies in this world that would leave many people thinking God's judgment was about to fall, but in reality, those are just signs of how sinful the world is. These false signs of the Lord's return are signs you may hear other people or Christians refer to when they are talking about the Lord's return being near. They will say something like, *"Jesus is getting ready to come back any day because of all the wars around the world, and because all the natural disasters I'm hearing about and because of all the false religions and cults that I'm hearing about that are growing."* Those are not signs that Jesus is about to return and Jesus wants us to ignore them. What are some signs to ignore?

Every one of those is an image of separation: nation separated from nation, kingdom from kingdom, the earth from itself, the stomach from food. Even the widow is an image of separation. She's separated from her husband and the life she once had. Those images describe not only what is happening around us but also within us. That's the hard and challenging part of today's gospel. It's showing and telling us something we don't want to see, hear, or deal with. It's too frightening, painful, and uncertain.

What if, however, they are not separations that destroy but separations that create and give birth? What if they are an opening, a space, for something new to come to life?

Jesus is never more compassionate than he is during these times. He speaks with such tenderness and reassurance. "Do not be alarmed." "This must take place." "This is but the beginning of the birth pangs." It's as if he saying, "Don't worry. This is normal. You're going to be ok. I'm the Midwife who will get you through this."

I wonder what would come of all that; what it would ask of us, what it would offer us, and what might be born.

What if, in those times when it feels like our life is shifting and separating and everything is being thrown down, we would trust the Divine Midwife and just push a little? Push with faith, push with hope, push with love, push with anticipation of something new.

Imagine the Divine Midwife next to us whispering, "Push, push, push. It's almost here."

People will hate us because of Jesus. But what we lose for following Jesus on the earth is not worth comparing to what we gain, Look at the promise at the end of verse 13. The one who stays faithful to Jesus to the end of their lives or the end of the world will be rewarded with eternal life.

Those who aren't in love with the beautiful structures of the world and instead give themselves in love for Jesus and others will enter a world where true beauty and delight never ends. Those who stay faithful to Jesus even though their friends and family think that they're stupid will be greatly rewarded. Jesus says it this way in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12).

We can't stop the end of the world from happening, just as the Jews couldn't stop the Romans from flattening their temple. The labor pains have begun and will continue until Jesus returns. We can't stop the adversity and trials and sufferings and pain and persecutions that will fill our lives in this age. God doesn't expect us to. He only expects us to do what we can do: stay the course, stay awake, be on guard, persevere, don't quit, be steadfast, don't move away from Jesus, keep going after him, and keep going after a world that's dying without him.

Following Jesus will be hard. Count the cost, but also consider the reward (v. 13). Those who follow Jesus and keep following him to the end will one day see that he was worth it. The end is coming. May God give us grace to not quit on Jesus until he comes or calls us home. Amen.