

## Mark 13:1-8

### Stone Upon Stone

*Built in 1908-09 St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Thunder Bay is constructed of white sandstone quarried on Simpson Islet, near Nipigon, on Lake Superior. The local newspaper at the time reported that the foundation stone came from nearby Mount McKay. The land was donated by Peter and Donald McKellar. The dedicatory opening services were held on June 13, 1909. It was declared a City of Thunder Bay Heritage Property in 1974.*

*The design of the building is 14<sup>th</sup> century Gothic, square in shape, with a gabled roof and a 95-foot tower at the north-east corner. The church was built at a cost of about \$72,000.00 and was designed by architects J.C. Stinson and W. Hood. M.H. Braden was the contractor.*

*The white stone trim came from Bedford, Indiana. George Dodd of Toronto, whose specialty was Gothic sculpture was hired to carve the details of the building. The iron work and roofing were supplied by J&T. M. Piper of Fort William. Windows were supplied by Luxfer Prism Co. of Toronto. The organ was made by the Casavant Bros. of Quebec.*

*When the opening services were held on June 13, 1909, it was a great day not only for the congregation but also the City of Fort William. Newspaper accounts of the opening declared it "the most imposing edifice of the city", and reported that other churches cancelled services so that their members could attend the opening of "the magnificent new structure".<sup>1</sup>*

This description of the church at which I am the minister comes from a heritage booklet the church has created. There is a long and rich history in this church, and the building is beautiful and majestic. When I consider all it has meant to people throughout generations of family, it reminds me of the response of the disciples as they left the Temple in Jerusalem, as written about in the Gospel of Mark. "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" They were in awe. What is more striking is Jesus' response when he says, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down."

We have a difficult enough time now when we watch amazing structures come down, but it happens. I think of recent history when the cathedral in Notre Dame burned in 2015. The structure and UNESCO heritage site had survived all kinds of events since its

---

<sup>1</sup> St. Andrew's Heritage Booklet 2018.

building during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but still it could not withstand the inferno that overtook it. As humans we like to think that things we build will stand the test of time, but time has a way of humbling us.

The same happened to the massive, imposing, and impressive Temple in 70CE. We often forget that the words we read about Jesus in the Gospels were not like news today with a 24-hour newsfeed to keep us on top of the latest happenings. The Gospel of Mark was written some time after Jesus' death and the people hearing these words had already seen the demise of the temple with the Romans crushing the Jewish revolt. They knew that Jesus' words of warning, maybe even prophecy, had come true.

Jesus refers to all that we experience, the toppling of stones as it were, as the beginning of birth pangs. It is what we go through as the world seemingly heads into destruction over and over again. We have just ended our commemoration of Remembrance Day and what it cost for us to have freedom from tyranny. People living and fighting in the world in those years would have felt as if stones were toppling all around them.

Stones are one way that we might describe the walls that we build to protect and bring safety. Many walls are built to keep some people out and others in. Think of the Berlin Wall, the walls being built in Palestinian areas by the Israeli government, or the wall that Trump was trying to build at the Mexican border. But what about the walls we build around ourselves, walls to protect our personhood and our property?

We build walls of defence when we have been brutalized, abused, abandoned, forgotten or simply feel unloved. Some of us put stone upon stone as we rely on the things that we might call toys...big trucks, big houses, big craft rooms or garages stored floor to ceiling with supplies and tools. Other have built large Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or Tik Tok followings with each "like", each follower, becoming a stone in the structures that defines us. Our phones the lifeline to our egos.

What we might look to in our own lives is what is it that we need to make us feel important, valuable, accomplished, or learned. If there is anything that comes before God in our lives then we might want to take a look at that and see if that is a stone that needs toppling. Because there is always something. Always the next thing we think we need to get done, the next thing we want to buy, the next project we want to see through, the next promotion or invite.

What Jesus may have been saying in this scripture was, all the things we think are important pass away, relationships, work, health. Still when no one was paying attention, as people were busy with their lives, Jesus did something that showed care. Even now we don't pay attention to Jesus' selfless act unless it is Easter and even then, much of the population thinks about chocolate and Easter Bunnies not why Easter.

In only a couple of weeks we will come to the end of the Christian calendar. November 28 will mark the start of Advent when we once again remember the Christ Child. Yet,

the rest of the year and especially right now, the point of this Christian faith is that even though we don't recognize our need to be forgiven, don't recognize the harm we have done, don't recognize the gift, Jesus toppled down the powers that be in our lives with his death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus, knowing that we wouldn't get it, still faced death for us and not just for some future heavenly existence, but so that we would know God now, would be in relationship with God now. We would know our value now.

The world is a messed-up place. Some of us get by less unscathed than others, but we need only look around to see how much pain and hurt is the experience of so many. A passage like this in Mark is a call to take notice of those who are not noticed but the world, to notice how we are living in the world, and to watch for God at work.

I appreciate what theologian and minister David Lose writes about this passage in his blog called In the meantime,

...what a difference it makes to notice! To know that we are beloved of God. To perceive the lengths and depths to which God will go to prove God's love for us. To recognize the worth and value we hold in God's eyes. To appreciate, finally, that God loves us – all of us – and to have the numbness induced by living in a world of outrageous spectacle pierce by genuine regard, compassion, and sacrificial love. And, through all this, to be saved, to be freed to see others as beloved of God, to risk caring for them, to reach beyond our isolation to touch and to be touched by love.<sup>2</sup>

Today my friends, let's take notice. Let pay attention to where our hearts and minds are. Then pay attention to God and where God is at in these birth pangs. You can trust that God is present. God is going unnoticed among us, still saving, still loving, still forgiving, still offering grace in the name of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

---

<sup>2</sup> Lose, David. <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/11/pentecost-26-b-beyond-spectacle/>