

**SERMON: 2018/11/18 (26th Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) -  
1 Samuel 1:4-20; Canticle - 'The Song of Hannah' (1 Samuel 2:1-10);  
Hebrews 10:11-25; and, Mark 13:1-8\_BTR**

[Invite children to the front.]

So, for the last *seven* weeks, some of the adults and I have been coming to church - *very early* in the morning - and going downstairs to work together on reading - *and coming to understand* - one of the books near the end of the Bible called, *The Letter to the Hebrews*.

It was one of the very first to be written - whilst many of Jesus' closest friends were still alive.

And it was given to a small church - like ours - in the great city of (Ancient) *Rome*: It was a *very* exciting place, full of politicians and temples and priests and theatres and circuses!

But many of the the people living there didn't like these new Christians who prayed to/ and worshipped Jesus.

They thought that it sounded all a little silly!

And because they started to feel a little embarrassed about going to Church on Sundays when everybody else around them was doing something else - like watching gladiators fight lions or leopards in the Coliseum, or shopping in the bustling markets - *some* of those (early) Christians began to wonder if maybe they should stop going too!

And this is why *The Letter to the Hebrews* was written: to remind us that Christ has done something very wonderful indeed: He has 'offered [Himself] for all time [as] a sacrifice for sins', and now "waits" in Heaven: [v.12-13].

And so, in thanksgiving for this amazing gift - of 'hearts sprinkled clean from... evil' [v.22] - we should 'hold fast', [v.23] and keep 'meet-ing] together' until He decides to return. [v.25] There's nothing more important.

Let's pray: Father God, ???, in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

I mentioned last time, that these last chapters in *Mark* contain *most* of Jesus' teaching.

Up to this point, you see, in this gospel's particular presentation, He had been a

man, principally, of action; *rushing* here and there, healing lepers [1:40-42] and the broken back of a 'paralytic' [2:3-12], walking on water [6:48-49], exorcising demons [7:26-30], restoring sight to the blind [8:22-25; 10:46-52], and so on.

And each of these "performances" - for lack of a better word - sheds light on important truths about the nature of God, the universe and His plans, but often only cryptically:

With so little time between His baptism and the Cross, Jesus often let these miraculous moments "hang" in the air, "pregnant" with meaning, to be deciphered by the Church later.

And, against the clock, He sped on to the next encounter, and the next.

However, having now arrived in Jerusalem, "the navel of the world," [n.1] and almost come to the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus seems - *finally* - to slow down; to *ease* His foot off the accelerator:

it's like a great, divine hand has reached for the TV clicker which controls the cosmos, and pressed the pause button; and this is the calm before the storm - *the 'earthquake'* [ref. Mt. 27:54, 28:2] - of Good Friday.

And what we have in the few verses that we're confronted with this morning, is the beginning of Jesus' *longest* speech in the gospel.

And it is the longest by a very *large* measure: by my count, there are - roughly, altogether - *forty-four* (spoken) sentences here, compared to only *seven* in the next longest "block," which is in chapter eight.

That's a *huge* difference.

So much so that it must be significant.

What, then, are we *slowing* down to consider?

What topic *demand*s that we focus in this way?

Well, here's a clue: this speech has been sometimes called - by theologians - the "Little Apocalypse." [n.2]

A mini "Book of Revelation" before *Revelation* itself.

Before it in the Canon, and before it in time - in history.

And in it, Jesus describes how the world will end: is there anything more intriguing than that?

I don't think so!

Don't you look around and wonder where this is all going?

Is it just going to be endless cycles of accusations and excuses; of finger pointing at others and then having the tables turned? Of short-lived triumphs and crushing disappointments? Of romance and flirting and then wrinkles and death?

And then to hear, this morning, Jesus indicate that "*No!*" - that there's something far better on the horizon and we're already seeing those "birth pangs" around us.

Of course, there have always been naysayers; sceptics.

And maybe you're one?

Maybe you think talk of "Heaven" and "Paradise" and "life after death," is "pie in the sky" fairytales? Merely the 'opium of the masses'?

A tool to manipulate the gullible - one to get them to open their purses or cheque-books?

(It is "Pledge Sunday" after all!)

But notice this line - verse two: hearing the wondrous exclamations of the Apostles about the majesty and size of the Temple - about, in particular, its 'large stones' - and they *were* 'large', by the way: between two and *fifty* tonnes each [n. 3] - Jesus responds, unimpressed saying - *scoffing*, "'Not one...will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.'"

And I mention this because He was *absolutely* right:

In A. D. 70, Titus Casear and the Roman legions burned the Temple, and then, having done that, *systematically* dismantled the ruin, leaving it a flat desert of ash - a "blank slate" on which, many centuries later, the Muslim armies of Arabia came and built their "[Golden] Dome of the Rock."

Indeed, His prediction - His chosen wording - is so accurate; so precise that, for many years, there were lots of scholars who couldn't believe that Jesus had really said this: one author - a contributor to a journal on 'Jewish Studies' retorts: 'This of course was written into the Gospel story by hindsight, in the light of the historical destruction of the Temple.'

Which means, he argues, that 'the Little Apocalypse...is probably of *composite* formation' - a "composite," that is to say, of actual reminiscences of Jesus and of the work of a 'final editor' after the fact, weaving into the narrative his own agenda and experience. [n.4]

But such "resistance is futile." - That's a *Star Trek* reference, by the way, and I'll give a free sucker to anyone who can say which alien species I'm referring to...

The evidence continues to mount that *Mark* - this gospel - was written *before* the Jewish war:

For example -

In 1955, in the Qumran cave archaeological site-of-interest, west of the Dead Sea in Israel, a tiny fragment of (torn) papyrus was found called, "7Q5" - smaller than the palm of your hand: you can see it, true-to-scale, on your bulletin; and written on it were 20 faint Greek letters - the words - or some of them, at least, *seemingly*, from chapter six of *Mark*.

Carbon-dating suggests that it was written around the year *fifty* A. D. [n.5]

That's twenty years prior to the Romans' desecration.

And this is only one "angle," championed by a number of 'renowned experts'. [n.6]

But it should give you "goosebumps!" [n.7]

Consider too the likelihood that this gospel was dictated by Saint Peter[n.8] - who was martyred before the war's end. It is full of 'interesting anomalies' that suggest as much; 'peculiarities'.[n.9]

There are other things we could say too, and though 'the question [remains] in a state of flux' - I won't mislead you - 'but it seems that we might settle on the suitable round figure of 60.'[n.10]

*Sixty.*

A decade before the Temple's unhappy fate.

Let that sink in.

In other words, Jesus saw the future - saw it as "clear as day."

And there was really no way Jesus could have known what He foresaw; no *human* way.

But then Jesus wasn't constrained the way we are.

He proves that here in *one*, short sentence; proves His "messiahship;" proves His incarnation.

Which is why we should pay attention to everything else that He has to say - and in this passage especially about His warning to not be "led" 'astray'.

But don't be "led astray" by who, exactly?

Now *here* He is vague:

'Many' who 'come in my name' - verse 5.

Later, in verse 22, He appears to elaborate a bit, adding 'false prophets', and I think, by this, He has mind leaders *in* the Church: priests, bishops, pastors, *preachers*: men and women with "new" interpretations; interpretations that render Jesus' message more comfortable, more convenient, more...*modern*.

The Gospel - you see, the call to repent and know the full-bodied love of God 'which endureth unto everlasting life'[Jn. 6:27, K. J. V.] - the "Good News" - is in constant danger in every age of being "hijacked" and "misshaped," and perhaps by those who mean well most of all. But usually this happens because the re-cast is more palatable, less-demanding.

God, however, is the 'plumb line', not us: [Am. 7:8].

And what He asks is that we 'provoke one another to love and good deeds', which won't happen if we 'hold' back or are restrained in our commitment to this congregation.

Let us, then, be gratuitous toward His "bride" - one-another - with the gifts that we have.

Let's take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. Levenson, Jon D. (July 1984), 'The Temple and the World', *The Journal of Religion*, Volume 64, No. 3, pp. 275-298, 283.
2. See, for example: Easton, Burton Scott (August 1912), 'The Little Apocalypse', *The Biblical World*, Volume 40, No. 2, pp. 130-138.
3. Goldhill, Simon (2005), *The Temple of Jerusalem*, Cambridge, M. A.: Harvard University Press, 60.
4. Maccoby, Hyam (1997), 'The Impact of the Destruction of the Temple on Gentile Christianity', *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Volume, pp. 1-6, 2. (My italics.)
5. See: Garnet, Paul (1973), 'O'Callaghan's Fragments: Our Earliest New Testament Texts?', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, pp. 6-12.
6. Thiede, Carsten Peter (1995), '7Q5 - Facts or Fiction?', *Westminster Theological Journal*, Volume 57, No. 2, pp. 471-474, 471.
7. Evans, Craig A. (1988), *Mark 8:27-16:20 (Word Biblical Commentary: 34B)*, Grand Rapids, M. I.: Zondervan, lxii: 'The condition of [7Q5] does not permit any firm conclusions.' Colin Hemer, another scholar, says: '[This] hypothesis must, I think, on the current showing, remain no more than a tantalizing possibility.' 'Fragments of Mark at Qumran?' (1973), *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin*, Volume 64, p. 11.
8. Bruce, F. F. (1943) 'The Sources of the Gospels', *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, Volume 75, pp. 1-19, 6.
9. Wallace, J. Warner and Strobel, Lee (2013), *Cold-case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels*, Colorado Springs, C. O.: David C. Cook, 92. See also: Dyer, Charles H. (1986), 'The Purpose for the Gospel of Mark', in Toussaint, Stanley D. & Dyer, Charles H. (Eds.), *Essays in Honor of Dwight Pentecost*, Chicago, I. L.: Moody Press, pp. 49-62, 51-52.
10. Stacpoole, A. J. (1964), 'A Note on the Dating of St. Mark's Gospel', *Scripture (Journal of the Catholic Biblical Association)*, Volume 16, No. 36, pp. 106-110, 110.