

Year B, November 18, 2018  
26 Pentecost (Proper 28)  
Christ Church, Mexia

This Sunday the gospel<sup>1</sup> describes the disciples' admiration for the Temple building and Jesus tells them how it will ultimately be destroyed – “Not one stone will be left here upon another...” This was unsettling news for the disciples, as it no doubt would be for us.

Rodger Nishioka, a seminary professor observes:

Towering buildings are not supposed to crumble to the ground. Oceans are not supposed to leap out of their seabeds and flood miles inland. The ground is not supposed to shake and undulate. The sky is not supposed to form a funnel cloud and destroy a town. Yet all who have watched the World Trade Towers collapse, seen a tsunami flood a nation, experienced an earthquake, or suffered through the power of a tornado know that such events happen. Those who provide care for the victims (of such events) report that all express a profound sense of loss.

And we see that now on TV in many of the interviews with those who have lost their homes in the California wildfires. Rodger continues:

Not only have they lost loved ones and property, but in a deep and abiding sense they have lost their innocence. They now know that something they once believed to be sure – that a towering structure would stand forever, for instance, or that the ocean would stay securely in its seabed – is no longer trustworthy. They have lost a foundational belief upon which they once built their lives. No longer will they be able to step on the ground without wondering, if only for a moment, whether the ground is going to remain stable. No longer will they be able to look up into the darkening sky without wondering if a destructive storm is on its way.

So how can we, or anyone affected by such calamities, deal with this loss of innocence? For one, Mary Borhek wrote, “One of the most marvelous facts of life is that every ending carries within itself the potential for a new beginning.” ... Whenever these things that we abhor, or fear happen - there may be an end, but there is also always a beginning. The Temple was destroyed, but a new way began.

Brian Pinter writing about the story in the reading of 1 Samuel<sup>2</sup> reminds us: “This story (of Hannah), like so many others from the scriptures, illustrates how God finds a way into our lives in times of desperation and sadness. In fact, the biblical record indicates that God longs to be with us in the moments of trial and hurt; the Lord has a preference for those who are suffering. While God certainly does not design or plan hardship for us, it is through our wounds, through the crack in the heart, that God's light enters our lives.” ... “(The) passage from Hebrews<sup>3</sup> (likewise) tells us that Jesus has provided us irrevocable access to God. ...there are no barriers between us and God, only the ones

we set up ourselves in our own mind and hearts.” This is the good news and comfort of the Word this morning.

And I know that most people turn to God when things are not good, when they are experiencing trauma. But I wonder how often we turn to God when things are good, when life is comfortable. I am reminded of a story about two Cub Scouts, whose younger brother had fallen into a lake. They rushed home to their mother with tears in their eyes and one of them said tearfully, “we tried to give him artificial respiration, but he kept getting up and walking away.” Do we tend to neglect God, at least a little, when things are going well? Don’t need it; I’m fine! Is it necessary to go to church and believe in God when we live in a country with such an unbelievable standard of living? Many seem to think not.

Well, the last story about the Cub Scouts also points out that we do have a mission when others are experiencing problems or don’t have the blessings that we enjoy. And in the hurricanes and other natural disasters of the recent past, we did see people who seem to be disengaged step up and do the work of God. And that is also good news. Because we need to be doing God’s work. Jesus tells his disciples bad things will happen, but don’t let that be your focus. Focus on me, don’t be led astray; do the work that needs to be done. As Christians, we have one charge, and that is to share the gospel with others – especially in the midst of life and world events

Joan Chittister wrote in an article in *Trinity News* a few years ago that, “Spirituality requires that we release the spirit in ourselves. ...

We must not, if we are to be spiritual people, fail to realize that life is meant to be nothing but a growing ground in God. If we fail to cultivate that part of us that is our truest self, how can the self come to full life in us? The spiritual life is the discovery of the self that God meant us to be so that who we are can be God’s gift to the rest of the world.”

And we are never alone - unless we allow ourselves to be led astray.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.

<sup>1</sup> As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!’ Then Jesus asked him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?’ Then Jesus began to say to them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs. (Mark 13:1-8)

<sup>2</sup> On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year after year; as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?' After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. She made this vow: 'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.' As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, 'How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.' But Hannah answered, 'No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.' Then Eli answered, 'Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.' And she said, 'Let your servant find favour in your sight.' Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer. They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked him of the Lord.' (1 Samuel 1:4-20)

<sup>3</sup> And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, 'he sat down at the right hand of God', and since then has been waiting 'until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.' For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,

'This is the covenant that I will make with them  
after those days, says the Lord:  
I will put my laws in their hearts,  
and I will write them on their minds',

he also adds,

'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.'

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:11-25)