

The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost B 2024  
November 17, 2024  
Mark 13:1-8  
(Sermon by the Reverend Michelle Manicke)

“Do you see what I see?...” Since we’re rapidly approaching December, our minds might jump to recognizing that this is a line from a popular Christmas song. But for you and me who are gathered here for worship, it’s important to note that “Do you see what I see?” is the question Jesus puts before all his disciples from the very beginning of his ministry on up to today.

In order to better understand where the rubber of today’s gospel story meets the road of our lives, you and I need a bit of context. So, the first thing to notice is that when we meet up with Jesus and his friends at the beginning of Mark 13, they’re on their way out of the temple. Now, Jesus has just spent considerable time teaching in the temple, and his teaching has been met with mixed reviews. While many in the crowd are impressed by his wisdom and compassion, some of the religious leaders are growing increasingly resentful and hostile because Jesus doesn’t shy away from calling out their greed and hypocrisy.

If you were here last Sunday, you may recall that Jesus has been teaching his followers to be especially wary of leaders who like to put on a big show for adoring crowds in order to get perks for themselves and shore up their own power. As we’ve seen, Jesus saves his harshest criticism for leaders who cheat widows out of their property. On the heels of this warning, as if on cue, a poor widow enters the temple and she puts her last two coins—all she has to live on—into the treasury. Knowing that this widow will go home and likely have nothing to eat, Jesus makes it abundantly clear to his companions that something is rotten in a system that not only allows this kind of injustice, but actively encourages it.

And yet, as we see throughout the gospels, some of Jesus’ friends either don’t get what he’s trying to teach them, or else they don’t retain the lesson for more than half a minute! As soon as they step outside the temple, one of the disciples is so distracted and blown away by the sight of the massive temple complex that he blurts out, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!...” Now, I can’t speak for you, but as I imagine this scene, I picture Jesus doing a mental face palm and counting to ten before asking, “Do you see what I see? Do you see these buildings made by human hands? Take a closer look! Do you NOT see what I see? Do you NOT see that all the buildings and institutions that are so impressive to human beings will be toppled and brought to ruin?...” Of course, some of you may know that Jesus is referring to the destruction of the temple, which took place in the year 70, when Roman occupying forces sought to stamp out the Judean Revolt. The Roman-Jewish historian Josephus, who lived at the time of Jesus, testifies to the widespread destruction and death that occurred, claiming that a million Jews died in this revolt against Rome. While this figure is probably an exaggeration, there were, in fact, countless casualties, as the revolt against Rome also devolved into a civil war between Judean Jews and their

neighbors and families.<sup>1</sup> This is a sobering fact for us to contemplate, as we live in the midst of our own nation's deep divisions!

Here I'd like to say a brief word about apocalyptic literature in the Bible, since this passage fits that category. While it's popular to think of the apocalypse as referring to the end times, the word "apocalypse" literally means "unveiling." In other words, it means God is unveiling things and revealing them, so that God's people can begin to see the truth. So, with his dire prediction about the temple's destruction, Jesus is posing the question to his friends at yet another level: "Do you see what I see? Can you see that the destruction and swirling chaos that will ensue are unveiling something you need to learn about your own brokenness and about the brokenness of this world?..."

"Do you hear what I hear?..." A short time after hearing Jesus' ominous prediction, his closest friends, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, ask him privately, "When will this be? How will we know when this destruction is about to take place?" Jesus responds by warning his friends to beware of those who tell boldfaced lies—especially those who invoke Jesus' name in a devious effort to strengthen their seductive deception. Jesus says to his followers then and now, "Do you hear what I hear? Do you hear the lies they're telling in order to lead my flock astray? Do you NOT hear how these corrupt and greedy leaders are invoking my good name in order to create chaos and further their own selfish gain?!..." He issues this warning because he's well aware that when chaos and fear take over, God's people quickly begin to flounder and sink in the stormy waters.... Friends, when you and I find ourselves paralyzed by fear and confused by chaos, we're unable to see or hear clearly, and so we grasp at things without stopping to ask, "Is that really true? Is that really what God is saying? Is that really who we are?" As often happens in tough times, many in our day seem to be grasping at the seductive promises of false messiahs and elaborate deceptions.

Do you hear what I hear, friends? I hear Jesus being brutally blunt with his disciples, as he warns us there will be wars and rumors of war, as well as earthquakes and famines. But if you read on in chapter 13 of Mark's gospel, you'll notice that Jesus is at the very same time being prophetically honest in promising that all this is "but the beginning of the birth pangs." So, I ask again: Do you hear what I hear? Do you hear the astonishing Good News that even in the midst of destruction and death, our God is always at work, bringing forth healing and hope and new life? Do you hear what I hear? I hope you do because this IS the Good News that breaks the chains of all human captivity and sets us free to live into the compassionate and courageous way of Jesus Christ.

"Do you know what I know?" The older I get, the more I realize there are many things I don't know. [Amen?!...] But two things I do know, and I will stake my life on them: First and foremost, God IS love, and God wants nothing more than to bring healing and new life to this

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<sup>1</sup> I'm grateful to Dr. Matthew Skinner for these insights shared during a recent "Working Preacher" podcast. "Sermon Brainwave #992: The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (33B) - November 17, 2024," [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), 5 November 2024.

world God loves so deeply. That is the purpose for which Jesus came into this world—NOT in order to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.<sup>2</sup> The second thing I know and will stake my life on is this: YOU are deeply and irrevocably loved. Each and every one of you! No matter who you are, or where you come from, or what you've done, or what you've failed to do, the Creator who knit you together in your mother's womb loves you and will never, ever stop loving you.... Do you know what I know? St. Paul knew, and he said it this way, "Nothing...can ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."<sup>3</sup>

Do you know what I know? Here's something else I know: Our gracious and merciful God wants nothing more than to set God's children free from fear, from the pitfall of lies and deception, and from all the false gods and idols that hold us captive. God wants to set us free for the abundant life that comes through loving and serving our neighbors. Furthermore, the Bible also tells us that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World and that in Christ there is no darkness at all.

My friends, in the days ahead, you and I will walk through the valley of the shadows, seeking to discern the spirits of our time and place, whether or not they be of God. May our path be illumined by the light of Christ, and may our discernment be guided by this precept: If it's not loving, liberating, and life-giving for us AND for our neighbors, it's NOT of God.

I'd like to close with a prayer for all of us:

Holy One,  
As we approach the threshold of Advent  
with our weary bodies and troubled hearts,  
help us draw strength and encouragement  
from your Living Word and from this community  
of people you have gathered here in your name.  
Open our eyes to see the Light  
that is coming into the world.  
Open our ears to hear your promise  
that we are never alone.  
Open our hearts to know the truth  
that the birth pangs of this dark and uncertain time  
will in due season bring forth healing and new life  
for this world you love so deeply.  
Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. John 3:17.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Romans 8:38.