

## **Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**Sunday November 15, 2009**

Proper 28B 2009

In the name of our one, ever creating, ever loving, ever sustaining God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is leaving the Temple to return to Bethany which is through the Kidron Valley and over the Mount of Olives. The day before, he had shut down the Temple by overturning the moneychangers' tables and driving out the merchant. Today he has openly preached against the leaders of the Temple who exercised great legal power under Herod and the Roman Empire as well as being the religious authority over Israel. That's bold! No wonder the powers that be were plotting to kill him.

Leaving the Temple, someone remarks on its grandeur and the enormous size of the stones used to construct it. They seem built to last forever and designed to give people the impression of the enormity of the power of those who rule it. Jesus replies telling them not to be so impressed – these grand buildings will be so thoroughly destroyed that not one stone will be left upon another. All will be reduced to rubble! Later, sitting privately with his disciples on then Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple and Herod's great palace, Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask Jesus when this will be and what will be the signs foretelling it?

This triggered in his disciples' minds images of the end times that are found in several books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Overlooking the Kidron Valley where, according to the Book of Zechariah, the final battle between God and the forces of evil is to take place would only heighten their apocalyptic expectations.

This kind of thinking seems to fulfill a human need. Apocalyptic thought usually arises

in times when people are insecure, when they feel that the world is out of control and they are powerless and their sense of identity and purpose is threatened. God will come and destroy all the wicked people who are causing these problems and we good people will triumph in peace. It also appeals to people who don't want to do the hard work of faith and would leave it all up to God.

We hear a lot of this kind of thinking today. There's movie coming out called "2012" that concerns prophecies derived from the Mayan calendar. People are always predicting the end of the world based on their readings and interpretations of Nostradamus and the Book of Revelation. The Tim LaHaye rapture books are enormous best sellers and many believe every word in them. TV evangelists are always telling people what God is going to do, when God is going to do it and why!

In Mark's gospel Jesus gives us some very good advice about how to live in a violent, greedy and uncertain world. His instructions are more about what not to do than what to do. First, he says pay no attention to who come claiming to be the Messiah, those who claim to speak definitively with divine authority as the Son of God. These people lead people astray by distracting them from living in the present and, as the BCP says, "doing the work they have been given to do". In other words, people intent on building empires - be they ecclesiastical, political or economic - are not the saviors of the world who will bring peace and reconcile us to God and one another. Jesus has already taught us the Way.

Secondly, pay no attention to wars and rumors of wars. There have always been wars and there will continue to be wars between nations. Such wars are caused by people not God - so don't give them any supernatural or theological significance. Don't use natural disasters such as earthquakes or famines as signs of God's activity. They have no theological importance. We live in an uncertain world and these events happen.

I have always wondered why Mark has put Chapter 13 at this spot in his telling of the life

of Jesus. It seems to come out of the blue and totally interrupt the narrative. Then I realized that this comes just before his account of the Passion of Jesus. He is preparing his readers for this account of the Crucifixion. He is debunking the common theological apocalyptic thinking based on despair and violence. He is preparing us to see that within the despair and violence of the crucifixion is the Resurrection. Within these violent signs God is acting in hope. God is a God of love. Jesus says that repeatedly.

The Kingdom will come not through violence and conquest – even by God- that is cheap peace. As a matter of fact, in the story of Noah, God promised He would never again use violence to destroy God’s own Creation. We have lots of rainbows here on Maui to remind us of that! The Kingdom will come through the transformation of human hearts. It is a gospel of hope not despair. Jesus is telling us that God is always there calling us out of violence in the worst of times. Mark lived in a time when the Temple was indeed destroyed and he tells his people in this gospel not to despair and follow others but to continue in the Way of Jesus. The Gospels remind us that when humanity gave God the crucifixion of God’s own Son, God gave us the Resurrection, not violence back!

The Christian and Jewish faiths are not dualistic. The opposite of God is NOT Satan. The opposite of Satan is the spiritual forces or angels of good. God is holy – that is unique. God has no opposite.

In our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, Hannah’s prayers were answered and she gave birth to Samuel in a time when the tribes of Israel were fighting one another and facing conquest. She gave the boy to Eli as a nazirite – one consecrated to God’s service. Samuel became Israel’s last Judge and a great prophet of the God who commands us to do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with God.

We still live an uncertain and violent world. But like in the time of Hannah and the time of Mark, God is also at work calling us into the life of the Kingdom of God. The Resurrection

showed once and for all time God's preference for true peace over violence, for life over death. Jesus showed the vulnerability of those who would rule through oppression and violence. Once that was exposed, it can never be hidden again. That is what makes the Gospel – the life of Jesus – and our continuing witness to it so powerful. We, too, have a role in this.

Amen.