

Sermon – November 14, 2021

By The Rev. Canon Dr. Lorne Mitchell

May our reflections on scripture this day inspire us to be strong followers of Jesus in both word and action. Amen.

This morning from the gospel of Mark we hear,

13:1 As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"

13:2 Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

13:3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,

13:4 "Tell us, when will this be?"

Fourteen years ago, I travelled to Israel for a 10 day tour of the Holy Land. I went with 76 other clergy and lay folk from this diocese – a pilgrimage that was part of the 150th anniversary of our diocese. There's no doubt, it was an experience that had a powerful impact on me.

Experiencing the geography and the layers of history brought the scriptures to life.

The Holy Land is like a small fertile corridor with two “oceans” on either side. On the west, you have an ocean of water, the Mediterranean Sea – and on the east you have an ocean of sand and rock – the Desert. Now in this narrow corridor between the Sea and desert the geography is quite varied. There are rounded old mountains, lush valleys and fertile plains. Because of this unique position and geography, the Holy land is the key piece of land that connects Europe and Asia in the north with Africa to the south.

This gives a strong clue to why it has changed hands so many times over the centuries. When civilizations from the north or the south feel a need to move due to famine, they need to pass through this corridor. If an empire wants to expand it needs to take control of this little piece of land.

That’s one of the reasons why the city of Jerusalem has been built, destroyed and re-built many times over the centuries.

Using our scripture readings as a jump off point, I’d like to share with you this morning four pictures I took while in Jerusalem. You see, it’s one thing to read about places and events in the bible - but to be there and stand at the places where these events occurred brings it to life in your mind.

In our gospel reading today we hear that Jesus and his disciples

came out of the temple...

I'd like to show you a model of what the temple in Jerusalem looked like in Jesus day:

Pic 1

In this picture, the temple itself is the large tall square building that is just to the left of the centre of the picture. That was the Holy of Holys. That was where the High Priests offered sacrifices at the Altar on behalf of the people. So in the Letter to the Hebrews we hear...

And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices...

All around the Temple, you can see that there is a large flat area buttressed by large stone walls. This area and the large stone walls surrounding it was a massive building project completed by King Herod the Great... the same King Herod that ruled when Jesus was born. The temple itself was destroyed by the Roman Legions in the year 70 AD. It seems that Jesus knew what he was talking about. Buildings come and buildings go... especially in Jerusalem. But to this day, the wall around the temple still stands. This is a picture I took 14 years ago.

Pic 2

In this picture I'm standing in the valley east of the city looking up at the great wall. As you can see, the valley is lush. Inside the city there is a place where people can get close to the wall. It's called the Wailing Wall. People gather there for prayer every day. Here is a picture of it I took.

Pic 3

"Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"

As you can see in the photo, some of the stones are huge - over 20 feet long. They dwarf the people standing and praying. It's easy to be impressed by such an engineering feat. But not Jesus. Jesus doesn't seem to be impressed at all.

Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

Some people like to think that Jesus foresaw the time when the temple would come down. That's possible. But the other part of it is that Jesus knew human civilizations come and go and their buildings go with them. Personally, I think that Jesus knew that the gospel message - the message of God's love and forgiveness coming into the

world was going to shake and crumble all the old structures of human society.

I'd like to move to the fourth and final picture.

Pic 4

In this picture, I'm standing looking west towards the old walls around Jerusalem. Down below you can see the rows of Olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane. Further to the right is the high ground called the Mt. of Olives.

When Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,

"Tell us, when will this be?"

Yes, indeed. When will this be?

It's a good question for us to ask...

When will it be that our hearts of stone will be turned to hearts of flesh?

When will it be that "I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,"?

When will it be that we will stop being so impressed by our engineering and instead put our energy into lifting up the lowly and binding up the broken-hearted?

I think if Jesus were walking with us today, he would not be impressed by the latest technological wonder. 5G networks? Smartcars? Emersive Apps? Joy rides into space?

No Jesus would not be impressed. Don't be overly impressed by them. Don't put your trust in them. They will all end up on the garbage heap one day.

Put your trust in that which is eternal... Put your trust in the love of God that breaks into the world... a love that is meant to be shared by reaching out to one another in our real lives... not by clicking a like.

Amen.