

November 17, 2024 – Twenty Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

“LIVING STONES” by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: Mark 13:1-8

Probably you all know that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, known as the ELCIC, has a long-standing partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, whose bishop is Dr. Sani Ibrahim Azar. I remember one of our Synod’s conventions when Bishop Sani Ibrahim was one of the special guests. When he addressed the assembly, he said, “If you ever go to Israel, don’t just come to visit the dead stones; come to visit the living stones, our people. Come to visit us.”

It is at the Temple where we find the Lord Jesus and his disciples in today’s Gospel. The Temple was a massive, beautiful building, constructed with huge stones—so solid that no one would think that one day nothing would be left of it, except for a few stones that were part of the retaining wall. The piece of wall that remains standing today is known as the 'Wailing Wall.' That’s it; nothing else remains today."

Every year, Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple from the Gospel of Mark comes as a prelude to Christ the King Sunday, which marks the end of the Liturgical Year and reminds us that Advent is just around the corner. But before we get there, we have these difficult predictions from our Lord Jesus.

It happened that as the Lord Jesus and his disciples were leaving the Temple, one of his disciples seemed quite impressed by the size and beauty of the Temple.

He said: *“Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!”* 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.”*

We assumed that Jesus’ comments about the future of this magnificent structure and what it represented for the disciples and the rest of the Jewish people required further explanation from Jesus. Clearly, the disciples were disturbed, shocked, and concerned about what they had just heard. The Temple was not only the center of their religious faith but also a source of pride for the Jewish nation. In one way or another, they all had a special connection to it. Perhaps some of their parents or grandparents had worked on its construction. In those days, every person aged 20 and older paid a Temple tax every year—half a shekel, the equivalent of two days' wages. The money was used for the upkeep and maintenance of the Temple.

Matthew 17, tells us that Jesus himself paid that tax “²⁴ *When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax^[1] came to Peter and said, ‘Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?’^[1]* ²⁵ *He said, ‘Yes, he does.’* “

This tells us that the Temple was more than just a beautiful, magnificent building for all of them; it was the place where they found their spiritual strength and identity. No wonder the disciples were concerned about what they had heard from Jesus. Later that day, when they were gathered on the Mount of Olives, 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?” It was then that the Lord started talking about the appearance of false Messiahs, rumours of wars, nations rising against nations, earthquakes, famines, and more.

In the year 70, almost 37 years after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, His prophetic words about the destruction of the Temple came true. The Romans suppressed a Jewish revolt that ultimately resulted in the exile of the people and the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple.

When you read this text, it’s easy to think that it refers to the end of times or to Jesus’ prediction of His second coming, but a closer study of the text shows that it is about the Temple—about the false and misguided belief that some earthly things are eternal.

The truth is that nothing in this world is eternal; everything is temporary. Everything comes or will come to an end. Not even the massive walls and heavy stones of a temple that took more than 47 years to build could last forever—something the disciples probably believed it could.

This is where Jesus' prophecy about the end of the Temple offers an important lesson. How many people, including us, dedicate and spend most of our lives building things we assume or believe will last forever, while neglecting the things that are truly eternal?

At a seminar, the speaker stood in front of a large group of people with a roll of stickers in his hand. Behind him, on the platform, were tables filled with props that represented the things in our lives – a car, a house, a tiny desk symbolizing our jobs.

The speaker roamed the stage and placed a red sticker on each item. He explained to the crowd that they may not be able to see it from where they were sitting, but each sticker contained the same word: *TEMPORARY*.

He said, “Everything that I’m putting a sticker on is temporary. It will not last. It will fade away. We invest our emotions in them because when we acquire them, they give us a little thrill. And we think the thrill will last. But it does not. It fades. And eventually, so will what we acquire. If you are living for what you see up here, then you are living for what is temporary: temporary satisfaction, temporary joy, temporary meaning. It will come to an end – but you never will. It will leave you with a terrible emptiness.”

Finally, the speaker placed red stickers on everything sitting on the stage.

Then he went on, “There is only ONE thing in this room that is not temporary. There is only one item that you will be able to take with you from this life into the next.” He took out a roll of blue stickers. A little girl joined him on stage, and he placed a blue sticker on the collar of her dress.

“When you get to the end of your life and take your last breath, what do you want your life to have been about? What will make it rich in the eyes of God?”

People, that is the answer to those questions.

We will live forever. Everything else is temporary. We are the living stones that God’s love will never destroy. The people you see, meet, or spend time with in this temporary world are the people you will meet again in heaven. This is why I believe each of us needs to be a people person, rather than a material person. Give your best to people. Offer your gifts, time, and treasures to people, because by doing that, you are offering them to God.

No wonder the Lord Jesus said, “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” For Jesus, *we* come first, because we are eternal. For Him, buildings, dead stones, and other material things come second, third, or perhaps last, because all of that is temporary.

When the Lord Jesus said, “Build treasures in heaven,” He meant: love one another, take care of each other, because those are the living stones that will last forever.
Amen.

