

Our Gospel reading this week reminds us that we are almost at the end of the Church year. The Church calendar guides us with Advent (when we prepare our hearts for the coming of God into the world), Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, the Season after Pentecost (filled with teachings and healings of Jesus) concluding the Church year with Christ the King Sunday. As Episcopalians we use a liturgical calendar to help move us as a Church into the life of being a Christian, following the life of Jesus--into becoming the Good News. On Sundays we hear small parts of the Scriptures (called pericopes) chosen for one of three liturgical cycles. (We are in year B and will enter year C in December—and we have alternative readings and Saint Days too!)



This reading from Mark comes from the Gospel of Mark when Jesus enters Jerusalem, shortly followed by the narratives of what we call Holy Week. Mark wants listeners to remember that Jesus comes not with the power of a King of this realm in the form of leadership but brings the power of God into the world in the form of healing and serving others. God's Kingdom does not look like Roman oppression or Jewish piety and ritual; God's power is not locked up in intuitions, even the Temple. As Jesus walks out of the temple, one of his disciples says 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.*" *Mark 13:1-2* Like the disciples we are asking, "Jesus, what do you mean?" We are being pointed toward understanding that Jesus enters time and history and that even the things we might never imagine tumbling down—will fall. God is here now--pay attention and stay awake, the turmoil and persecution is a revealing of a new beginning. As Christians we see the cosmic battle and already know Christ has broken the bonds of deception and illusion; the Spirit leads us into a new creation, and it is hard.

The warnings in apocalyptic literature, are not predicative, but descriptive. *When you hear of wars and rumors 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 birthpangs.*" What the disciples see as permanence in the great stones of the temple and all that the temple represents, is transient. God's inbreaking power is not held in buildings of stone; God is acting now, and God will act; even destruction and fear will reveal to the followers of Jesus dependence on God.

Jesus tells the disciples how to live during this time when all appears to fall apart; false leaders will try to lead with deceptive promises; it will feel as though we are under attack and our lives threatened. We are warned not to lose heart. The Spirit will give us words to speak to false power. (Mark 13:11) Pay attention. This was the case in early Christianity and continues to be true for the exploited and marginalized people of our world. Wake up and be aware.

The declaration of Jesus that we do not know the time of destruction is important. We do not know the when of "end times," only that destruction is also a beginning, "birthpangs" that brings new life. Over and over, it would seem, we find ourselves having to acknowledge our participation in deceptive structures that are not of God's own making. The shaking up of the world is ever present and God is here.

When we live through times of conflict in our personal and communal lives, when it would seem all falls apart, we are dependent on God.

