

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer, Amen.*

Good Morning,

Today we concluded our study of St. Mark's Gospel. This is the end. Next week we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. Then we are into Advent, a new liturgical year. Our journey this time will be through the Gospel according to Luke.

In a recent letter, *On the Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Frances said something which I believe applies to all Christians and to any reading of sacred scripture. He wrote:

*“In the presence of God, during a recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: ‘Lord, what does this text say to me? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this? Or perhaps: What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?’”*

I recalled these words as I read over today's Gospel. Actually, the questions: “What troubles me about this text?” and “Why am I not interested in this?” were what really popped into my mind. I must confess all apocalyptic literature gives me problems. It wasn't until I was in college that I was able to read the Book of Revelation without having the 'bagezzez' scared out of me and nightmares for the next few weeks.

All I could focus on was the destruction and disaster and death. I didn't like thinking about the end. I didn't want to recall how unprepared I was for it and to reflect on what would happen if this was to be the day that I was going to meet my maker. So, I generally avoided those passages and tried to steer clear of the parts of the Bible that spoke of the 'End Times' and the 'Second Coming.' I didn't want to think about being left behind. This wasn't an easy thing to do on the campus of an evangelical college in a time when one of the nations biggest hit movies was the Exorcist, but that is another story for another time.

The point I want to make today is that much more is going on in this passage. This isn't just a warning to us that God is watching and that we better be good, because like Santa, God is making a list and checking it twice, only this time with eternal consequences, if we have been naughty and not nice.

No, that's not what I think is happening. We see this more clearly when we change the Popes question from “Lord, what does this text say to me?” to “Lord, what does this text say to us?” Specifically to us, His disciples gathered here at Trinity Episcopal Church in Atchison, Kansas. And then to ask ourselves, "What do WE find pleasant in this text? What is it about this word that moves US? What attracts US? Why does it attract US?"

Well, here's why it moved me and why I think this passage should move us and be attractive to all of us here.

First of all, these first verses eight verses, in fact all of chapter 13, which has come to be known as Jesus' 'The Little Apocalyptic Discourse', comes right after Christ's last visit to the temple which we heard last week and his prediction of the destruction of the Temple we just heard just a few minutes ago and right before his upcoming passion, death and resurrection which begins in the next chapter, Mark 14, continues to the end of his Gospel.

You see Jesus is trying to prepare Peter, James, John and Andrew, and through them all of the disciples, for what is about to happen next. He wants them to understand what is going to take place. He knows things might look bad to them. But he doesn't want them to be afraid, or despair or give up hope. This is not the end ... These are but the birth pangs, this is just the beginning, the start of a change, the very first moments of something new... But it is not the end.

Apocalyptic thought generally, and this 'little apocalyptic discourse' in particular, is not intended to scare us; it is intended to give us hope.

That's what we should all find pleasant, moving and attractive.

When the foundations are cracking and our temples are crumbling; and it appears that things are about to come crashing down around us, it is important to remember, as all Apocalyptic Literature ultimately tries to remind us, that God is in control; destruction, disaster and death are not the last words. In Christ, the last words are always words of resurrection and new life and love.

That doesn't mean that moments of change and transition and flux won't also be periods of confusion, frustration and fear; they will be. The future is always, by definition, unknown and for that reason can seem a little frightening but we need not be afraid.

The passage we heard this morning is just the introduction. After Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple and his discussion of the sign of the end, he goes on at length to talk about the persecutions, sorrows and the great tribulation they can expect. Then He speaks about the coming of the Son of Man. Finally, He concludes this discourse with a parable and says to them, "Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"

I think that's really the part that scared me most. You see, I remember standing, no actually sitting down, in right field to get a better look at some ants coming out of a hole while playing and then hearing the crack of a bat... So, I know first hand the troubles

that can arise when we are not paying attention or being on the lookout or as alert as we should.

But here's the good news, we are not to watch and stay alert because Jesus is going to punish us if we fall asleep, or because something bad will happen to us and our world if we nod off. NO! Jesus wants us to watch and to stay focused because He knows we will miss something exciting and wonderful and beautiful if we don't. That is what it is about, this word, this text that should MOVE US and ATTRACT US and EXCITE US.

We are, all of us, right now in the midst of a time of change and transition and development and on a number of different levels: nationally, locally and personally.

On November 1<sup>st</sup>, our Episcopal Church's first African American Presiding Bishop, Bishop Michael Curry, was installed; I official became your new priest in charge; and to top it all off, the Royal's won the World Series! That's a lot for one day...and to quote Bob Dylan, "The times they are a chang'n."

When change is going on all around us there will always be the temptation to look back, recall the good old days, and to try to just hang on. But Jesus is telling us, as he did his disciples, to look ahead. We are being called to work together and to move forward. We need, as we are now, to pray together and to trust the Holy Spirit, as well as one another, and to allow the grace of God to work in and through us to transform our Church or parish or community or world and our very lives.

This is a time of change, yes, but not a time to be afraid. This is a time of new possibilities, a time to dream and love as we have been loved. And, this is a time to believe that in Christ all things really are possible to those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose...In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

