In Due Time

1 Samuel 1:4-20

Mark 13:1-8

“Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” (Mark 13:1b)

I think I know how the disciples felt as they walked out of the Temple and looked up at the building. Grandeur like they have never seen before (remember they were from the countryside, lowly fishermen many of them) and they are in awe. My husband and I have been fortunate to have visited many cathedrals in German and England. You can’t help but be in awe, especially when you think about when they were built. They were the centerpieces of their communities and stand out in so many ways still today. Of course, the architecture is something to behold. These buildings are so massive, in height and square footage. And the grandeur doesn’t stop with the architecture. The details in the carvings and the stained-glass windows are stunning. You can’t help but be in awe! I understand how the disciples felt.

The Temple in Jerusalem was a holy place for the Jewish people. It was the place where they believed God dwelt. It was here that they came on pilgrimage to worship and sacrifice to God. It was a place that represented who they were as a people. It gave them identity and meaning. So, you can imagine the shock the disciples and those who were within listening distance felt when Jesus responded with, “Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

There is historical context that is important to note as well. The Gospel of Mark was written during the first Jewish war with Rome. It was a time when the people saw the Temple destroyed. Jesus’ words were literally coming true for them. They were seeing those stones being thrown down. It wasn’t just imagining what life would be like without the Temple as anchor or framework for their lives, it was reality. The place that gave them meaning and identity was gone.

There are all kinds of structures in our lives that provide meaning and identity. It may be literal buildings or spaces. For me the outdoor worship space at Daycholah Center is one such place. It holds significance in my faith journey and every time I visit Daycholah Center I make it a point to go and sit for just a few minutes. You may have those places too. Those things that provide a framework may be institutional structures that provide stability and assurance for us as individuals and as communities – constitutions, by-laws, rules, norms. We can also find that framework in our relationships. When these things change, we may feel as if the walls are crumbling around us. We find that we are floundering as all those things that gave us direction and meaning are lost. Right now, in the life of this congregation, as you go through a transition in pastors, it may feel this way. There are pieces of ministry that may not be happening and may never happen again. The way we understand “church” may be giving way to new ideas we don’t really understand, although others may embrace them. For some this election cycle has been challenging as core values of human interaction seem to have eroded. What was once considered unacceptable or inappropriate has now become the norm. We speculate on what will happen and how things will be different for ourselves and others. In our personal lives grief over the loss of someone we love can force us to reconstruct our lives. I don’t know how many times after my mother passed that I wanted to pick up the phone and call her about something that was happening in my life. There are so many other things that happen in our lives that cause us to feel like the world is crumbling around us.

At first glance, Jesus’ response to the disciples doesn’t seem to offer much comfort or hope. He says there will be wars and rumors of war, nation will rise up against nation. There will be earthquakes and famine. That doesn’t paint a very uplifting picture, does it? But then in the very last sentence of the passage we find a glimmer of hope and good news. “This is the beginnings of the birth pangs.” Birth is all about something new coming to life. Something new being created. It isn’t about an end; it is about a beginning. Hold this thought for a minute and I’ll get back to it. I want us to look at the look at the Samuel passage.

Hannah is facing a time when it feels like the walls are crashing down around her. In the time Hannah lived, the most important job for a woman was to provide her husband with a son. Hannah is unable to do this, her womb is closed scripture says. The community in which she lives would have been looking on her with judgment. She is living with the ridicule for her husband’s other wife who has many sons and daughters. Reminds us of others in the Hebrew Scriptures who had the same issue - Abrahm/Sarah/Hagar and Jacob/Rachel/Leah. Hannah goes to the Temple at Shiloh and prayers that God will rebuild that framework that will give her meaning by giving her a son. She encounters Eli, the priest, and shares her situation with him and he shares in her prayer. Then scripture shares these words (1 Samuel 1:20), “In due time…” Not right away. Not with a snap of fingers. But in due time.

Now let’s bring these two phrases together. In the midst of struggle or uncertainty, it is hard to see the possibilities that are out there, but in due time we become more open to the opportunities that are available to us. How do we become open and work toward creating something new? There are three passages that for me provide that framework in all situations. The first comes from Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God.” When I am feeling overwhelmed, taking time to remember that it isn’t all up to me. That God has my back, and I can trust in God to lead me forward. The second is from the prophet Micah, “He has told you oh mortal what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” It is these core values that provide the framework I need to know how to act as a follower of Jesus Christ in the world we live in. The third passage is found throughout scripture, “love the Lord your God with all your might, your heart, and your soul. And love your neighbor as yourself.” It isn’t all about us and what we want or is good for us. We live in community and the needs of others is just as important. All are made in the image of God.

It may not seem like it, but even in the most difficult of times there is hope. Hope is the gift that sustains us through the days of darkness and times of waiting. Something new is waiting to be born and in due time it will be.