

Proper 27B (Pentecost 24), 2009

Text: Mark 13:1-13

Title: "The One who endures to the end will be saved."

+ INI +

The temple was everything for the Jewish people.

To start with, it was an impressive structure. The first thing you would notice was its height. It rose to a height of roughly eighteen stories. This may not sound like much in a city like Chicago, with our impressive skyscrapers, but if all the buildings in your town are single story homes, to see a building rise 180 feet into the sky would be quite impressive.

The outside structure of the temple was gleaming white, built with alabaster and marble. The cedar roof was supported by 162 columns. The doors were adorned with gold, and silver and bronze fixtures covered many of the walls.

Inside the main structure were other smaller buildings. The main building was sanctuary- the holy place and the holy of holies. This inner sanctuary was even more impressive.

The walls- 150 feet in total length, were entirely plated with gold. On the roof were spikes of gold to keep the birds away. Hanging over the entrance were gold chains. Along the porch were gifts of gold and bronze from rulers throughout the Roman empire. There was even a mirror of gold that reflected the rays of the sun through the entrance. Inside the holy place was the menorah, which was made of solid gold and weighed 150 pounds. The table for showbread weighed even more. There was so much gold in the temple of Jerusalem, that when the Romans destroyed it, gold flooded the market, and gold was only worth 50% of its former value.

But the temple was much more than just an impressive building. It was the center of religious life. God's very presence with His people was located there, right there in the temple.

Now the Jewish people had survived without the temple before. When they settled in the promised land, they used the tabernacle, a tent, a portable temple. But then Solomon built a grand structure to serve as God's dwelling place with His people.

The temple had been destroyed before. When the Babylonians came, they plundered the temple and razed it to the ground. But the Jewish people had returned and rebuilt, and now they were in the process of expanding and renovating the temple.

When Jesus tells His disciples that the temple would be destroyed, He was talking about tearing the heart and soul out of the Jewish people.

The attacks of 9-11 were painful and scary. It was not just about the horrific loss of life, but the terrorists took down our tallest buildings and damaged the control center for our military.

Imagine if they had also taken out the White House and the Capitol building. These are more than just buildings, but have symbolic value that far surpasses their physical grandeur.

Jesus predicted that the temple would be destroyed, and forty years later the Romans did just that. In 66 AD the Jewish people rebelled against Rome. Four years later, the Roman army took Jerusalem and destroyed the temple.

The temple has never been rebuilt.

But the destruction of the temple was only the first of many signs of the end. The destruction of the temple would be a terrible disaster, but it was only the beginning.

Jesus tells of disaster and strife, in political, religious, and family life.

There will be big things, like war, earthquakes and famines. Hundreds and thousands will lose their lives. Hurricanes and Tornados, floods and tsunamis, volcanoes and earthquakes. Bombings, coups, shootings, kidnappings, terrorist attacks. These things should not surprise you. They seem to be in the news nearly every day.

When you see or hear of these things in the news, it is a reminder that the end is near, that this world will not last forever, and that the Lord will return.

But it's not only these grand, spectacular disasters. Violence will be directed against the church. There will be resistance to the gospel and those who follow Jesus- beatings, arrests and trials.

If you thought you were in for an easy life here in the church, you were wrong. You should expect that the gospel will provoke a reaction in people around you.

It may even be within your own family. It may be your parents. It may be your children. It may be your brothers and sisters.

Yet Jesus promises- He who endures to the end will be saved.

In all of this Jesus Himself shows you the way. Jesus Himself fulfilled His own prophecy just days after He made it.

Remember, Jesus speaks these words to His disciples on Tuesday of Holy Week. He knows what is coming. He knows what lies ahead. He knows what Friday will bring.

Jesus knows that the temple of His body will be destroyed. In Jesus Christ God dwelt here on earth, just as He did in the temple in the days of Solomon. In Jesus there was one more precious than the temple. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again." When Jesus said this, He was referring to His body.

When Jesus was crucified, the temple of His body was destroyed, broken, pierced, utterly dead. Just as the Romans would destroy the Jerusalem temple, they first destroyed the true temple of

Jesus' body. And yet three days later, it was rebuilt in His resurrection, even more glorious than before.

Jesus foretells great natural disasters- including earthquakes. Remember what happened at Jesus' death- darkness for three hours in the midday. And then when Jesus died, there was a great earthquake, even splitting open the tombs in Jerusalem.

Jesus foretells a great battle. Wars and rumors of wars. In the crucifixion, Jesus battled with Satan. Although it appeared that Satan was victorious, by His death Jesus destroyed death and opened the way to eternal life.

Jesus tells the disciples that they will be arrested, beaten, and brought before kings. This happened with Jesus, as you well know. He was betrayed by one of His closest friends. He was arrested in the garden. He was beaten and He was mocked by the soldiers. He appeared before Caiaphas, the high priest. He appeared before Pilate and before Herod. Throughout it all Jesus spoke truly and faithfully. And eventually Jesus was sentenced to death.

Jesus tells His disciples that their families may turn against them. On the cross, Jesus was forsaken, even by His own Father. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He cries. Jesus bore the sins of the world, and their consequences. We deserved to be forsaken by God, and yet Jesus takes our place.

Jesus stood firm to the end. He endured to the end. In the face of betrayal, in the face of natural disasters, in the face of arrest, trial, and beatings, in the face of battle with Satan, in the face of death itself, Jesus endured to the end, and Jesus was saved, raised from the dead.

So what does that mean for you?

What Jesus says to His disciples goes for you, too.

You will face wars and natural disasters. You will face opposition and persecution. You will face family strife.

But you will not face these things alone. Jesus is with you, and He's been through all of these things already.

You're going into battle with a veteran soldier, one who has faced all these enemies before and defeated them. He's by your side and will not leave you. He's been through it all, even death, and been victorious.

You have been joined to Jesus in Holy Baptism. Through the water and the word, you have taken part in His crucifixion and resurrection. You've been through all of this, too, and come safely through.

You don't need to fear war or famine or natural disaster. You don't need to fear betrayal, arrest and trial. You don't even need to fear death itself, because you have been crucified with Christ, you have been buried with Him, and have been raised to new life.

Christ is not just with you in some spiritual, metaphysical way. You receive His true body and blood in the Lord's Supper. The same blood shed on the cross is given here for you.

You endure to the end, not by your own strength, but because Christ stands with you, and Christ stands inside of you.

You endure to the end because Christ has not only joined Himself to you, but He has joined you to the other members of His body, the church.

When we come to the communion rail, sometimes we have blinders on. We think this is a personal moment, just me and Jesus. It's much more than that. Jesus is joining you with those at the rail with you. Today, I give you permission to go ahead and look around. See those who are there at the altar with you. See those who come before and after you. These are your brothers and sisters in Christ. These are the fellow members of the one body of Christ. They are with you, too, to support and care for you whatever lies ahead. We're all in this together.

You are not alone. You don't need to stand alone. You stand firm, because Jesus is in you, Jesus is with you, Jesus is in your brothers and sisters here at church, He's been through it all, and He gladly goes through it once more with you.

He was with the disciples as they witnessed the destruction of the temple, as they were beaten and arrested, as they were brought before kings and rulers, and as they were betrayed by their own family. They endured to the end.

Jesus will be with you, no matter what you face or what lies ahead. He is your Endurance and your Salvation.