

Pentecost 25, Lectionary 33, Year B
Mark 13:1-8
Epiphany, Winnipeg

“You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, and there will be earthquakes and famines...”

Every now and then you’ll hear some talk about all of this as though Jesus is predicting things to come. But Jesus doesn’t need to predict that there will be wars, because he knows that there have been wars...it seems like there always have been. Wars that his own people, Israel, were involved in, or wars where the Babylonians or the Persians or the Romans took over. He just knows that over all the centuries people and nations have fought each other. He didn’t need to predict natural disasters because storms and earthquakes and volcanoes...had always roamed the earth. He didn’t need to predict that there would be famine, because he knew that his own people had had times when they suffered and starved over all those centuries; he only had to look down the street and around the corner to see people who were hungry in his own time and living in their own famine. He didn’t need to have any special insight. It could be that he’s just saying, “You know those things that you have always seen or heard about? They’ll keep on going, you know.”

Even we don’t need to hear anything about rumours of wars or famines or natural disaster. We don’t need rumours, we just need the news, or a phone call with a relative in a wildfire zone, or another Remembrance Day that stretches from Vimy Ridge to Afghanistan, or the obvious...pandemic...that follows on the heels of other pandemics. These things aren’t predictions or rumours. We just know they will always be with us.

When we hear Jesus saying all these things today I imagine that he’s speaking not with a big strong preacher voice, but maybe he’s saying this with a

shrug and a little tilt of his head. Maybe he says it like a parishioner I had in southern Saskatchewan who had seen and experienced so much in ninety years and he just looked off to a space in the middle of the room somewhere and said, “Life is hard, you know.” Or maybe he says it like a friend I knew who lost their partner and their dad and their job, all in the same year, and all they had left to say was, “All this happened...to me.”

So picture this: Jesus and his disciples have just stepped out of the gates of the temple in Jerusalem – this huge building that for centuries been the centre of the religious life of the Jews – Jesus’ own people, because he’s a Jew, of course. One of Jesus’ friends looks up ten stories to the top of the walls, and he looked down the length of one wall that is the length of five football fields, and he looks in the other direction along another wall that’s only three football fields long, and then he turns to Jesus and says, “ Look at it, it’s huge!”

But Jesus is distracted, and he walks slowly along the foot of the wall softly dragging his fingers over the stone as he passes by. He feels all the bumps and cracks and the dust in the rocks. His mind wanders to what might have happened in the hundreds of years of that temple’s life – all those people and animals and ritual, and that presence of God so strong in that that place that was built and destroyed and rebuilt. He walks quietly along and thinks about all that history of his own people, and he looks ahead to what might be in store for the days and years to come, and then he turns and says, “You know, nothing’s going to be left here. It’s all going to be torn down.” Someday it will be rubble and dust.

And then he moves on from the temple and walks further into Jerusalem where his own life will be taken from him in just a few days; his own temple will be taken down, and any new life will have to come from somewhere.

Maybe even Jesus is struggling with what we all know to be true – the things we thought might last forever...that we'll always have with us...won't.

The connections to our own life are so obvious, aren't they? Too obvious. All the things we've put together to build our lives and our world and our society seem shaky, and if Jesus says, with a sigh and a shake of his head that it will all come down, he's just saying what we know could well be true. We've seen in the last few years we've started to wonder about the future of...the office tower, when everybody has figured out they can work from home...or the future of the mall, or the church, or the CFL. Or the future of the handshake and the hug, or a crowd gathered for a concert. All these pieces that just made up the building of our lives, we wonder if they'll be left standing. Even relationships that have been carefully and lovingly built up over years seem shaky – the stones are falling down – as we disagree over vaccines and restrictions....and some people in southern Manitoba are saying that they haven't been this divided since World War II, when faithful people from long pacifist traditions divided over going or not going to war.

In this reading today Jesus isn't making predictions. He's just holding up a mirror, and we're seeing what we all know is true.

And maybe while Jesus holds up that mirror outside the temple on that hot dusty day, he's just as uncertain or afraid as we might be as we look into the mirror on a cool snowy morning. He gets it. He sees in the mirror too.

But he gives us something else to see as well. These eight verses we heard today are the beginning of a long talk of Jesus, and it's only a few days before his own death. He warns that there will be confusion and suffering... AND there will be new life coming out of it all, and there will be new beginnings, just as there always have been, just as there will be in a few days when Jesus has died, but is given back his life and rises up out of stone and rubble.

While Jesus says all this he goes back now and then and quotes the prophet Daniel who also wrote about suffering and struggle and the coming of something new for a people whose lives and nation and world have been pulled apart and thrown down. As Jesus speaks to his disciples he has in mind old old stories of his people that he's probably known most of his life. Even Jesus started to learn these stories at some time, like some of our kids are downstairs learning them now. Nobody comes pre-programmed. Jesus would have learned and then had in his mind, in his heart, in his bones, stories like the ones you might know: stories from the Bible, stories from your grandma, stories from your own life. Stories of slavery and freedom, stories of barrenness and birth, stories of destruction and rebuilding, stories of being lost and finding a home. Stories that should have ended because all the stones and blocks that held life together were taken apart and thrown down, but stories that did not end because the life of this world that God has created does not end.

Jesus holds up a mirror to us and also shows us those same stories that we carry with us. Stories from Scripture and maybe even a story or two or dozens and more like that from our own lives. And at the centre of all those stories is the one that Jesus is about to live out himself: A story of his own dying and rising again, that gives life for us all.

Jesus holds up a mirror and shows us that we can enter into whatever is to come next without fear. Well, OK, we can be super-scared if we want to; that's just being realistic. But we can enter into whatever is coming next knowing that we are not alone and that life will always be the end of the story and the beginning of a new story, because Christ is with us, and Christ is risen.
Alleluia. AMEN.