

“Thankful Trusting In Our Firm Foundation”

B, Pentecost 26; Mark 13:1-8

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13 As he walked away from the Temple, one of his disciples said, “Teacher, look at that stonework! Those buildings!”

² Jesus said, “You’re impressed by this grandiose architecture? There’s not a stone in the whole works that is not going to end up in a heap of rubble.”

³⁻⁴ Later, as he was sitting on Mount Olives in full view of the Temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew got him off by himself and asked, “Tell us, when is this going to happen? What sign will we get that things are coming to a head?”

⁵⁻⁸ Jesus began, “Watch out for doomsday deceivers. Many leaders are going to show up with forged identities claiming, ‘I’m the One.’ They will deceive a lot of people. When you hear of wars and rumored wars, keep your head and don’t panic. This is routine history, and no sign of the end. Nation will fight nation and ruler fight ruler, over and over. Earthquakes will occur in various places. There will be famines. But these things are nothing compared to what’s coming.

I. MY, WHAT BIG TOWERS YOU HAVE!

Are you “easily impressed?”

Or, are you one of those people who is reticent, skeptical, an “I’ll believe it when I see it,” type? What are you impressed *by*?

Jesus and the disciples are walking around Jerusalem. They have just been “on the front lines” all week long. Challenges, conflicts, verbal sparring – you name it!

Since Jesus entered Jerusalem to much fanfare a few days earlier, it’s been one confrontation after another with the religious authorities; folks trying to trap and discredit him, even at times plotting his death.

Jesus just keeps holding steady, facing his opponents boldly, openly challenging them right back! With parables or outright statement of truth in the face of their lies. Speaking truth to power. And.... the tension is building...and building...and building.

And yet, in the midst of all that is going on, after the last of Jesus’ denunciations of the scribe and his notice of a poor widow giving her mites in the Temple, *all* his disciples can pay attention to—like a bunch of tourists – is those *amazing* large stones and big towers! “Wow, Jesus! Get a load of that! Check out the size of those things. They’re gonna last forever, doncha think?!” (And Jesus does a facepalm.)

Marcus Borg gives the guys a little credit: “Their wonder was well founded; the temple and the walls of the temple platform *looked* impregnable. Some of the stones were forty feet long, ten feet high, and fourteen feet thick and weighed five hundred tons. Jesus’ response warns of what will happen: “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” (p. 243 – *Jesus*)

If you’ve been to the Holy Land, you know just how permeated the land and cities are with ROCK. Limestone seems to be the number one thing in Israel and Palestine –for centuries. Rocks, rocks, everywhere!

Jesus doesn't marvel with them. He simply replies:² Jesus said, "You're impressed by this grandiose architecture? There's not a stone in the whole works that is not going to end up in a heap of rubble."

II. WHAT ARE WE IMPRESSED BY?

What are *you* impressed by?

What impresses you? What do you marvel at? Whether walking around a place you've never been before, or looking around your neighborhood, your circle; where you hang out in life?

The disciples were impressed by bigness. By huge structures and seeming solidity and strength.

David Lose suggests that we are not all that different. That, perhaps, we are trapped within "a culture of the outrageous."

"Maybe not large stones, but what about large homes, or large cars, or large vacations, or large resumes, or large Christmas presents, or.... Tensions in our communities, polarization across the country, discord in our family, decline in our congregations... and all too often all our culture has to offer is spectacle."

"Maybe it's a large list of FB Friends, or a large Twitter following. Maybe it's a large number of news outlets we check relentlessly, barely able to put our phones down at night for fear of missing out. Maybe it's..."

What are we impressed with in our church or our community? What makes us stop in our tracks and marvel? Are they large stones that will last forever, or are we too focused on things without a firm foundation that might crumble anytime?

What is our "means of assessment? What is God's measuring stick? What does God marvel at in *us*? What foundation does

the Spirit want to lay down in us that is lasting; will not topple in the winds and whims of the times?

What are "gospel criteria" for greatness? What would Jesus say we in the church *should* be focused on? It's sure easy in Budget, nominating and evaluation season to get focused on the numbers, isn't it?!

What would Jesus have to say about our modern churches' "perceptions of ecclesial success?" (Karoline Lewis phrase)

III. IMPRESSED ALL OVER THE PLACE!

I was impressed just this past week and month.

Cong. Meeting –great turnout, great preparation and presentation by all, an amazing amount of work over the past months, and thoughtful, dedication, visionary, forward-thinking and open-minded people!

Vote! And great questions asked by the congregation.

Our 90+ crowd continues to impress me. Mark and Alice have some ideas for ministry and fun with that crowd in the new year and I'm excited about that.

Rallying around one another at the hour of need—in the neighborhoods and the church family

Bowie's cooking! Care of the pastor and family.

Bazaar!

Nominating Committee meeting this week! Survey! People! Enthusiasm!! The Spirit is a "Movin" in this place! This is NOT something humans are doing—this is God at work.

All the things that go on here "behind" the scenes are a marvel! From Norma keeping the kitchen immaculate to VirJeanne putzing in her little Subaru all over town with soup and loving care for folks, to the Trustees quietly (usually) fixing and

improving things – whether smoke alarms or bathrooms, floors or flowers. With Rhonda connecting people and resources in every way imaginable, *and* chauffeuring and making beautiful cards that bring the recipient to tears.

I am impressed by Janet and Teresa, whose planning and practicing behind the scenes and in front of a crowd—for church *and* community—are a marvel!

By Doyle and his Diligent Diaconate –especially this time of year when the duties are numerous and the spiritual life of this congregation hinges on their dedication.

I'm going to stop now, because I will leave someone out and that is *not* my intent! You know you are *all* impressive, as you bring your mites –your gifts of time, talent and treasure to this church family and the wider community. As you interact and interface with Optimists and scouts, with PEO and hiking groups, chorale and kids' education and support.

I am impressed by how our congregation is moving in new directions and that new things are not set in stone. Some mistakes will be made. Some things will not work. But that's not failure, it is growth, expansion and learning...

IV. IMPRESSED BY NOTICING THE LITTLE THINGS

In the story immediately preceding this one – the story we read together last week – Jesus draws attention to someone no one there was likely to *notice*: a widow, making an incredibly *insignificant* monetary donation that was incredibly *spiritually* and morally significant because it was everything she had.

What is Jesus impressed by? What does he notice and marvel at? It's almost the opposite of the disciples!

Remember that? Jesus is watching “the *crowd* putting money into the treasury.” Moreover, “*many* rich people put in large sums.” Yet despite that fact that she is just one in a crowd, and that many people were putting in significantly larger sums,

Jesus' attention is given to, even fixed upon, the much smaller, if not paltry, offering of this woman.

Jesus wants the disciples to learn *this* lesson: To *see* her. To acknowledge her person, her being, her plight, and her offering. To notice those who are not so impressive and easily seen. Not so seemingly marvelous; even invisible, yet worthy of Jesus' attention, and ours.

Jesus is impressed when we look around and see those who have been *overlooked*. When we ask ourselves, in our daily lives: “Who have we forgotten, ignored, overlooked? Have we made someone into an issue or a *cause* when, first and foremost, they are people?”

David Lose suggests that our *noticing* puts faith into action, as we identify with others and reach out to them, we notice the same needs in ourselves and connect to our neighbors more deeply.

“Championing the poor” is one thing; knowing the name and taking the time to care about, a specific person who has very little is another thing all together.each of us, no matter what our status or wealth, has days – and some of us many – when we feel invisible, unremarkable, not worthy of attention. Yet Jesus also sees *us*, deems us worthy of God's attention, and frees us to give the same compassionate regard to others.”

And conversely, when we *don't* notice, don't see others through the eyes of Christ, we are getting out of step with the Way of Jesus:

“Indeed, this penchant to not simply ignore others but to view them as fearful, even subhuman, seems increasingly prevalent. The migrant caravan, persons who have been incarcerated, those trapped in poverty, persons of a non-majority ethnicity or sexuality. [Remember:] Jesus *sees* them, just as Jesus sees us.

How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in your life you will have been all of these. (George Washington Carver)

I was struck by this saying that's on the bulletin cover: "A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they'll never sit in." (Greek proverb)

I wonder if Jesus would say: "Be impressed by people who live beyond themselves."

Marvel at those souls who are always learning, always seeking to do and be more. By eyes and ears and hearts that are open, stretching, reaching out –looking for solutions; asking "how can we make that work" rather than: "that'll never work!"

Would Jesus marvel at those spirits who "look for the AND" – how can every challenge be met with collaboration, both/and thinking, and a teamwork approach toward the win/win?

V. FALSE LEADERS/WHOM TO TRUST?

Jesus concludes this teaching about foundations that last and those that don't, by warning the disciples about "false teachers."

⁵⁻⁸ Jesus began, "Watch out for doomsday deceivers. Many leaders are going to show up with forged identities claiming, 'I'm the One.' They will deceive a lot of people."

We will touch on that more next week as we celebrate "Christ the King Sunday" before Advent begins and conclude our series: "Where Would Jesus Lead."

For now, we take note to be "wise as serpents and gentle as doves" when discerning the hearts of leaders and teachers. Look for the fruits. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Look for the

motives, the intentions and the integrity of those who claim to speak for us or our God.

Look for the foundations, the core values, the bedrock that hold fast –principles and principals that don't tumble in a storm or crumble to the ground when the ground gives sway.

VI. OUR FIRM FOUNDATION

What is the foundation of our faith? Of our congregation? Of our own lives in Christ?

What impresses us so much about the Christian Life that we want to walk in Jesus' steps every day, not just Sunday?

Ever stop and think about *why* you are a Christian; a follower of Jesus? Was it just that you were taught that by parents or other adults? That's a good foundation in itself. But, it's also important to be intentional about our faith journey at every stage of our lives.

There are all sorts of things we are impressed by that turn out to be shaking foundations. Where is our foundation to be planted? In God, even with unknown future and anxiety about what lies ahead.

God notices the widow at the Temple, giving her two mites and her all. God notices US!

Bruce Epperly reminds us that Jesus also gives great comfort and guidance in this passage in Mark:

"Don't be afraid, God will be at work in the future to bring new life."

"In the spiritual journey, there can be a shaking of the foundations. We may feel unsettled; our world may turn upside down as a result of some new insight. We may feel at risk; but this experience is part of the divine midwifery. It appears to be an emergency, but it may be an emergence of new energy and creativity."

Birth is on the way. In all things, God is working for good, but we have to pass through the birth canal and in the midst of the process, we don't know what the future will bring. We must trust that God will bring something beautiful out of the crises we are experiencing."

VII. GIVE THANKS AND NOTICE!!

What are you impressed by? What do you notice? In the outside world? In the inner life of the soul?
What is the marvel that is our faith, our trust in God?

We come together each week, as a church family, to remind ourselves of our "firm foundation." Of that which matters on a deeper level; of those truths and convictions and commitments that *will* last. That's won't tumble and crumble.

David Lose concludes with a reminder to us of why we do what we do – on Sunday or any day:

"[This] is why we come to church. So that once a week we can realize and be honest about our limited attention span, our penchant for spectacle and preference for the outrageous, and then to realize a second thing, a more important thing: that God loves us anyway and *just* the way we are. That God has not given up on us. That even as we marvel at things that just don't matter and miss the ordinary and extraordinary sacrifices around us, yet God still comes... to us... always in love... always to save."

On this Thanksgiving Week, we give thanks! For one another, for this gathering, for this circle.

"Give thanks with a grateful heart, give thanks to the Holy One!" Give thanks that he's given us Jesus Christ to show us the way to live in God's Way. Give thanks for our firm foundation, ye saints of the Lord. Let us sing, celebrate the Rock that never tumbles, and give thanks. Happy Thanksgiving! Amen.

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