

November 14, 2021 25th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Daniel 12:1-3, Psalm 16
Hebrews 10: 19-25, Mark 13:1-8

[Debie Thomas in Journey with Jesus, "Not One Stone," posted 11/11/21. Robin Wall Kimmerer in Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants, page 33-35.]

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Not a stone will be left on stone

The stones of the great temple in Jerusalem were big, massively big.

Think 38 feet long by 20 feet wide by 12 feet tall.

I can't blame the disciples for being awestruck as they leave the temple in today's gospel.

Who wouldn't marvel at this architecture? at the construction? at the grandeur itself?

The temple represented so much... certainty, stability, and permanence.

For them, it represented the very presence of God.

While we can hear the awe in the voices of the disciples.

It's Jesus' tone that catches me: "You see these great buildings?" he asks, continuing
"Not a stone will be left on stone."

Where even his own disciples seek certitude,

Jesus knows the twinge of birth pangs, the coming of something new.

This section of Mark is known as the Little Apocalypse.

It's part of the same genre as Daniel, like we heard this morning, and Revelation.

Some are drawn to these types of passages.

They do all sorts of mental gymnastics and arithmetic to zero in on what the signs and meaning might be.

"Tell us when this will be," even the disciples quietly ask Jesus. "What will be the signs?"

Plenty of others are repelled by these passages, or just plain confused.

The word Apocalypse literally means to un-cover, to pull back the veil.

Un-covering: That's what Jesus is trying to do here.

Look beyond the temple,

look beyond where and how you expect to find God, Jesus is saying.

This temple, and the political and religious systems it represents,

there is much that needs un-covering.

At this point in Mark's gospel, Jesus is headed for the cross, soon, very soon.

He knows that God's power won't be bound by a building, even one with grand stones.

Rather Jesus' power will be held in his body, in his life and ways,

in his death, in his life beyond death and the salvation it brings.

God knows these are uncertain times, despair comes easily.

We, too, may yearn for that physical assurance that big stones and temples can represent.

Nations are rising, kingdoms are falling, wars, and famines and earthquakes.

“Don’t be alarmed,” Jesus says, this is what happens when there is an **un-covering**, this must take place.

Climate activists and developing world leaders cry out on the streets and in the meeting halls of Glasgow.

COVID continues to surge, hospitals fill, and grief and worry are real.

We’re reckoning with race, with the layers of own racial identity, with the system changes before us.

The violence on our streets is all too familiar, kids are struggling, families are maxed.

In all of this, dear ones, there is a lot.

It surly feels like not a stone will be left on a stone,
so much is teetering.

Debie Thomas has helpful words, “In this troubling context, it’s easy to despair.

Or to grow numb. Or to let exhaustion win.

But it’s precisely now, *now* when the world around us feels the most apocalyptic,
that we have to respond with resilient, healing love.

It’s precisely now, when systemic evil and age old brokenness threaten to bring us to ruin
that we have to ‘hold each other tight’ and allow the veil to part, the walls to fall.

What’s happening, Jesus promises at the end of this week’s Gospel reading, is not death, but birth.
Something is struggling to be born.”

“Yes,” she continues, “the birth pangs hurt...”

But God is our midwife, and what God births will never lead to desolation.

...we are called to bear witness in the ruins, but rest assured: these birth pangs will end in joy.”

So how do we live in times of change, when there is much un-covering?

How do we live with the birth pangs?

Just a few reflections today.

We live with gratitude, with generosity.

In a section called Offering, in her book Braiding Sweetgrass, Robin Wall Kimmerer, writes about her
childhood summers spent canoe camping in the Adirondacks.

The morning rituals and images are vivid: the squeak of the hinge on the outhouse door,

the mist coiling from the lake,

the little battered, blackened aluminum coffee pot "...already thumping."

She writes, "I can picture my father, in his red-checked wool shirt, standing atop the rocks above the lake.

When he lifts the coffee pot from the stone the morning bustle stops;

we know without being told that it's time to pay attention.

He stands at the end of camp with the coffeepot in his hands,

holding the top in place with a folded pot holder.

He pours coffee out on the ground in a thick brown stream.

The sunlight catches the flow, striping it amber and brown and black as it falls to the earth and steams in the cool morning air.

With his face to the morning sun, he pours and speaks into the stillness: 'Here's to the gods of Tahawus.'

Over the smooth granite the coffee runs, meandering through the thirsty lichen, merging with the lake.

"Then and only then does he pour out steaming cups of coffee for himself and my mother,

who stands at the stove making pancakes.

So begins each morning in the north woods: **the words the come before all else.**"

Robin Wall Kimmerer is an enrolled Citizen of the Potawatomi Nation, a mother, a scientist, a professor.

She writes of indigenous wisdom, and plants and science,

and the times of connection and disconnection with her own story, her own language.

With the words that come before all else.

That is how we can live in these times.

Today we celebrate Gratitude and Generosity Sunday.

Some years ago we here at Hope took to speaking of stewardship

by speaking of our gratitude and in turn our response, our generosity.

Today we receive and bless our pledges for 2022.

These are financial commitments to support God's ministry in and through this community.

Whether we give a little or a lot, or somewhere in between,

it's the commitment to giving our time, our prayer, our labors, our wealth, that is essential.

The words that come before all else,

the pouring out of an offering,

the first fruits,

the trust that God will provide, that we don't need to live tight fisted, hoarding what we have,

but rather we give first back to God.

God will provide even in uncertain times, even when the pangs of birth are close.
How do we live? We live with the words and actions that come before all else.

Our theme for this fall's appeal is Sustaining Hope.

We've been about Sustaining Hope during the challenges of these last years,
and now we're about Sustaining Hope, this community of Christ
called into the complexity of these days.

I asked recently for you to reflect on why you give:

One person wrote about giving as a joyous response to the gift of forgiveness and to Jesus' sacrifice.
Someone else spoke of giving to insure that God's ministry continues.

Another wrote about being sustained by prayer and their gratitude for the prayers of this congregation.

As many of you know, our family is deeply connected to two congregations,
to University Lutheran Church of Hope and also to First Congregational Church, UCC,
our good neighbors across the highway, where my spouse Jane is the Pastor.

We give equally to both congregations, combined it's a little more than 10%.

Robin wall Kimmerer's story and that image of her dad in the red-checked wool shirt, coffee pot in hand,
has had me reflecting:
thinking about my mom at the kitchen table, bills laid out before her,
writing the church offering check... religiously,
telling me what she was doing, and why.

That was a witness that left an impression.

That was the transmission of faith and values.

Friends, there's an old temptation to avoid speaking of money whether with family, or with friends.

I've learned that these conversations shared well can be holy, can be fruitful,
can, as Hebrews says, be part of provoking one another to love and good deeds.

In these uncertain times, when the earth is changing, when mountains tremble,

God is here, God's love will not let us go.

Let us be that people that can live deeply with gratitude, with generosity, with hope in the midst of birth.

Last week, long time church member Phil Thompson died at the age of 88, after some years living with
Alzheimer's Disease.

As we close today, let us take time to remember Phil and to pray.

Phil grew up in Bismarck,
in a strongly Norwegian American home,
the son of the North Dakota State Superintendent of Schools.

Early on he fell in love with music, playing piano, violin, French horn, all things classical, and later: the musical saw!

While he enjoyed music, it was art that captured Phil most fully.

Phil and his beloved wife Joy met as students at Concordia College in Moorhead where they both studied art.

In 1959 Phil joined the art faculty at Augsburg College, now Augsburg University.

He spent his adult life creating art and teaching others all phases of art: drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and stained glass.

This large piece with the Madonna and Jesus and the cityscape of Minneapolis hangs here in the south transept.

Many other pieces by Phil are in the lounge, and scattered around the building.

We've marked Phil's artwork, so after worship we encourage you to take a bit of a gallery walk, for it shows a lot about Phil, his faith, and his life.

Phil and Joy have been deeply part of the Hope community for decades.

Their home and studio space in Prospect Park were filled with Joy's weavings created with the use of naturally dyes, with Phil's creations, and with the artwork of students and other artists, alike.

Joy passed away in the early fall of 2019.

Phil and Joy have two children: Sarah and Eric.

A memorial service will be held later for Phil.

When members of this community die,

we remember how the same waters that first washed over them in baptism, hold them now in death. In his death, like in his life, Phil is held by God.

We pray at these baptismal waters, linking ourselves to God's powerful waters of promise.

Let us pray...Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our brother Phil. We thank you for giving him to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. At the waters of baptism, you welcomed him into your love. At the waters, you comforted him in times of trouble and encouraged him in delight. At these waters, you now enfold him into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with all the saints of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.