

When the walls crumble

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Mark 13:1-8

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13:7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come.

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Fewer places are more precious to me than 1799 Hassam Road in Coraopolis, PA...my grandparents' house. It is a house that was built in the 1920's by my great grandparents and would later become the house for which my mom would grow up in, and the same house that my whole family still returns to

for holiday celebrations and summer gatherings. It is a house that has remained relatively un-changed over the years – the walls in my mom’s childhood bedroom are still the same lavender color with posters of her high school heart throb still hanging on the walls. And there are moments when I sit looking at these unchanged walls and think to myself “*oh the change these walls have seen*”.

Over the years these walls would have seen the cultural transition from the family huddling around the radio for evening broadcasts, to later being one of the only homes in the neighborhood that had a colored TVs (colored being more and orange and green color), to now a home with a tv almost in every room, one of which is a beautiful flatscreen TV with the sharpest of images.

These walls would have watched my grandmother sitting on the edge of her bed with tears streaming down her cheeks as she read letters from my grandfather who was overseas during World War II... never knowing when or if the next letter would come.. to now watching as my grandparents awkwardly fumble with the computer to SKYPE with their grandchild is also deployed overseas in war. In an instant they can hear his voice... and see his face and no that all is OK.. Can you imagine the change these walls have seen?

These walls have seen the evolution of the family photograph from a single black and white photograph taken in the family room on my grandparents wedding day that would have taken weeks to develop... to now beautiful colored sharp pictures

snapped on cellphones which then immediately gets updated to Facebook and Twitter so that in within a one-hour period can easily be seen by our friends and family all over the country. Yes, these walls have seen the coming and going of our human institutions for the last 100 years each creation capturing the attention and dazzling our human mind with admiration.

In our passage this morning, the disciples pause to admire another form of a human creation... the beauty of the stone structure of the temple. They, like many of us, find themselves captivated with this extraordinary human creation. Which causes then causes them to lose sight on our focus on that which is right in front of them - Jesus .

Jesus immediately responds to this human distraction by redirecting the attention of the disciples back on God reminding them of how easy it is to be led astray. In fact, there even seems to be an urgency in Jesus' tone.

Now this urgency is often read as a prophetic telling that the world is going to end a prediction that the apocalypse is near.. But perhaps it's actually more of a realistic portrayal of the human tendency to place our attention on our transient tangible human creations rather than our intangible faith in God. This exchange between Jesus and his disciples highlights the ways that we in our humanity admire our own human kingdom over and above working for God's kingdom. Our human structures, no matter what they are made of, stone, technology, photography, forms

of communication... will crumble. As my grandparents will have seen, they will either disappear completely or evolve and change into something new.

And it seems that with each new human creation... a new host of distractions is born right along with it. For the disciples it was their admiration for the stone human stone creation of the temple. For us, perhaps it's our inability to be look up and be present with our neighbor because we are too busy looking down at our phones. We are not able to see the beautiful landscape in the background on our family vacation because we are too worried about how we look in the foreground because if that picture is going up on Facebook or Instagram for all of my friends and family to see.. I better look good. We are too consumed with what will appear on our over-priced holiday drink rather than thinking about what it means to do the work of being a Christian during the holiday season. We live in a world a world of distractions that take our eyes away from our spiritual centering on God and work of bringing about God's kingdom.

Now, it's not that our various human creations in themselves that are somehow wrong.. Well, it's not the temple in the story that is that is somehow impure – it's the distraction of the disciples – it's the way we allow these human creations to capture the majority of time time, energy, and focus. So the work for us as Christians is not to avoid these things – because surely they are inevitable -

but rather to use them as vessels to bring God's kingdom into this world. It's not to LOVE the temple – it's to use the temple.

So... How can we use our human creations to be the temple that proclaims God's word rather than the stones that steal our attention? What does it mean to use the temple rather than love the temple?

Well, I think the first step is to begin in the same place Jesus does, by naming this human tendency for humanity to become distracted with our own human inventions– that so too we must name it in ourselves. We must be able to recognize the moments we are on our phone instead of present with our friends. We must be able to see how preoccupation to worry about our own money and houses rather than our neighbor on the street. Jesus names this right away with our disciples and we should name it in ourselves. We need to be able to name it in our children... so that as they grow up in a world of screens they too will know how to name those moments of distractions and nurture relationships with God.

The second thing we must do to allow our human creations to be the temple is we go back to the basic intention of the design of a temple - vessels to proclaim God's word. How can we use our human creations to be a declaration of Christ? I think We must use our amazing human innovation and creations to find ways to communicate or share God's presence with the world. Perhaps we take pictures of God's creation and name it as that – God's creation. Perhaps we walk with our

eyes open so that we can see scripture coming alive through the ways we are helping and caring for one another or examples of mission out in the world.

Moments after the horrible news came out of France... social media burst open with prayers for peace. Pictures went up of the flag. A small, yet meaningful way, that our amazing human networking created a brief moment of solidarity. Perhaps we use our human imagination to develop a way that sets our faith as a priority in our culture rather than something we hope we have time for.

The final thing we must do... is invest time into intentional focus on our faith, on Jesus. Put our time and effort into helping the poor, reaching out to a friend in need, giving a voice to the voiceless, and build community. If we spent as much time volunteering in a Soup Kitchen as we do on binging on Netflix... imagine the change we would see in our world. If we spent as much time holding hands with someone alone in a nursing home as we do on social media... imagine the lives we could change. If we put as much time into living out what it means to be a Christian at Christmas time as we do with caring about what it printed on our disposable cups – imagine the kingdom we would invite into this world.

Yes, my friends there must be an urgency of Christ's tone in our passage. Not in a way that tells us to stock the cabinets with pantry items in the event of the Armageddon but in a way that calls urgency to use our creations to engage the

Spirit. And urgency that calls us to transcend our human barriers with our faith in Christ.

I know full well.. that just as Jesus predicts that so too one day the walls of this house on 1799 Hassam road... will crumble. Just like every other human creation... these walls of this precious house will fall. And our family will weep as we think of the Thanksgivings and Christmas's that we had around the table. Of the laughter that filled each room... and even of the simple pleasures of routine and family traditions. But, my family will continue on because we will also know that that we have gained from that home far exceeds the physical walls... what we have gained is founded in the love we have learned from one another, the ways that we have remained faithful despite the unexpected turns in the road.

And so it is with God's kingdom as well. Because what we have learned from Christ far exceeds the physical human kingdom we create – what we learn from Christ it is the promise of this kingdom that that sustains our hearts and nourishes our souls. Because our human creations do change us... and thus we must remain faithful to the one thing that remains constant in our life... God. So may each of us live with eyes wide open to the moments we become distracted, active in using our human innovation to proclaim the gospel and to share God's love with the world, and faithful to living as Christ our Lord taught us to do. Because Otherwise... we too will crumble. Amen

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