

Twenty-Sixth Sunday After Pentecost, November 18, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 13:14-23

“Don’t Be Deceived!”

In today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus is preaching to His disciples right after leaving the Temple, and is on the Mount of Olives – across the valley from Jerusalem and the Temple. He uses the term “*the abomination that causes desolation.*” What?? Who talks like that? Jesus did for a purpose as He is referencing to words from the Prophet Daniel 12:11 “*From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.*” So what is this “*abomination that causes desolation?*”

You know that the Temple had daily sacrifices on the altar. They had the Altar of Incense, the Altar of show bread, and the altar where they burned sacrifices – spilling the blood so that people could be saved by the blood. About 170 years before Jesus was born a horrific event happened to the Temple and to Jerusalem. A Seleucid Syrian king, a pagan, influenced by the Greek Culture, named Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He took over Jerusalem and horribly desecrated the center of Jewish life – the Temple. Antiochus set up an altar to Zeus right inside the Second Temple in Jerusalem, which was in direct violation of the second Commandment, as found in Exodus 20:4, “*You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*” And then if that wasn’t enough - the abomination - he sacrificed pigs on the altar of the Temple. Let’s roll back here for a second. Pigs are ‘trayf’ – unclean animals. There were no pigs in all Judaism – yet this guy – this pagan king decided that he was more important – and was going to sacrifice these pigs to Zeus. That would make the Temple unclean. This king thought he was god and could do anything he wanted. This king thought he was god and could do what he wanted. You can read more detailed accounts of this in 1 & 2 Maccabees, the historic books of the Apocrypha – not part of our 66 books of the Bible. During this horrible time in Jerusalem the subsequent revolts by the Jews became the basis for the feast of Hanukkah, with the miracle of the oil for the lamps of the Temple lasting seven full days. This evil king, Antiochus, caused such pain and destruction in Jerusalem that people saw the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy; the “*abomination that causes desolation.*”

Jesus used this very term to warn the disciples of another event, one which would happen in the year 70 AD, when the Romans would totally destroy Jerusalem, and the Temple. In the beginning of Mark 13 – verses before today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus spoke these words. Please turn in your Pew Bibles to page 1580, and let’s look at verse 1 “*As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” “Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus, “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”*” (Mark 13:1-2) Jesus, had just left the Temple for what would be His last time, prophesied that about forty years later, the Temple would cease to exist, there would be no more sacrifices, and Jews would be running for their lives from Jerusalem. Jesus tells His followers not to panic, that the end of days was not then but would come later. The term “*the abomination that causes desolation*” was fresh in the

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minds and hearts of every Jew and brought fear to their hearts that something like that could ever happen again. Not only that, but Daniel had survived the destruction of the first Temple, when the Jews were sent to Babylon and they were held there for many years. What Jesus said about the stones being strewn down there is evidence by the southern steps of the Temple – easily steps that Jesus would have walked on – as they were cut out of the mountainside – not laid there. Right near there are huge blocks that used to be a part of the western wall. They found them when they were excavating to find a street from Jesus’ time, buried among the rubble. Historian Josephus, a Roman Jew, he tells the terrible tale of the siege of Jerusalem; how people starved, ate their own babies to stay alive, fought each other both for scraps of dirty food and for small-scale political gains in the factional fighting, more Jews being killed by other Jews than by the invading Romans. Many Jews escaped to Masada – but that is another story for another day. The Temple and the city of Jerusalem would never be the same – demolished – just as Jesus had prophesied. All that was left is what we today call the Temple Mount. The Jews would now need to reconstruct their lives around the Law, instead of the Temple, or even better – they could see Jesus as Messiah and build their lives around Him.

Jesus adds warnings that are meant to encourage His followers, to stay close to the faith, and continue to share the truth, not being enticed by false prophets and false messiahs. A very important phrase that Jesus uses near the end of today’s Holy Gospel reading is found in verses 22-23 *"For false Christs (Messiahs) and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect--if that were possible."* *"So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time."* Jesus mentions “*the elect*” – there are debates about the elect throughout time, throughout Christendom, if you remember what I said last week – that Jesus choose you. In John 15:16 Jesus said, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last."* Jesus is referring to the people whom He has called, the ‘*elect*,’ to continue in the faith, and not to trust any imposters who proclaim to be “a Christ” or “a messiah,” which means “the anointed one” – for He has given the encouragement to trust in Him, and not anyone who claims falsely to be Him. Please also remember that the risen Jesus gave encouragement for His followers when He spoke His Great Commission on a mountain in Galilee, in Matthew 28:20 when He said, *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* The promise to never leave or forsake His followers has to be always remembered, no matter what!

Jesus gave the Apostles, and us, a glimpse of His second coming – in the verse immediately following today’s Gospel Mark 13:26-27, on the bottom of page 1581, Jesus says *"At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory."* *"And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens."* That is great news; good news. If you believe in Jesus – that is all you have to worry about. Jesus promises that there will be a time coming when He will return, and everyone will know that it is Him, and He will gather those He has called to Himself. He also gives us more great encouragement in verse 31 - *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."* You want to talk about foundation? Jesus said so Himself *"I am*

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the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”* (Mark 13:31) Instead of our worrying about when the end will come, we need to stay close to His words, we need to stay close to the Word of God, and to watch and be alert.

We are about to enter into a season of preparation, of expectation, of hope – the season of Advent will begin in just two weeks from today on December second. Everything will be purple in the church. The four Sundays of Advent prepare us not only for the excitement and remembrance of the birth of Jesus, but for the day when He comes again – *“in clouds with great power and glory.”* That is great news!

Last week I shared with you about the people on the coast who suffered damage from Hurricane Michael and about St. Paul’s Anglican Church, Lynn Haven, Fl. that is no more. It is gone and it not going to be rebuilt, because the people of that parish have gone. We are also seeing the tragic fires in California and the devastation of the towns and homes. I truly hope and feel that the message that we can take from this 13th chapter of Mark is that when disasters happen we must be encouraged that this is not the end. This is a great time for God’s people to pray for the victims and that people will be raised up to show them the way to God, that is only found in Jesus Christ, there is no other way, and the promise of salvation in His name only. Don’t be deceived. It is not in the name of any other god. When Moses asked the burning bush what His Name was – He responded *“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”* (Exodus 3:14) There is no other god that goes by that Holy Name, not Allah, not Baal, not Buddha, not Krishna. I know this is not politically correct – but I am speaking the truth. I have promised you that I would never speak anything but the truth in this church. So, let me repeat those names again that are nothing: not Allah, not Baal, not Buddha, not Krishna. Jesus Christ is the One whom we pray to, He is the One and only Name that bring us salvation. Do not accept any other false gods or those who try to stand up for them. As Jesus said in Mark 13:5 *“Watch out that no one deceives you.”* The Apostle Paul put it this way in Ephesians 6:12 *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”* This is undeniable – and also uncomfortable to hear!

I want to close with some of the words that Jesus ended this thirteenth chapter of Mark’s Gospel with: *“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” “Be on guard! Be alert!”* (Mark 13:32-33)