

A Different Kind of Messiah and Lord
based on Mark 12:38- 13:9, David Jahnke, 10/4/15

Jesus and his disciples had just spent a 4th day teaching in the great center and symbol of stability and order— Jerusalem's temple. Here it was understood that God resided in a unique way. Here sins were forgiven through sacrifices and repentance. Here the elite of Israelite society held court and interpreted laws, and otherwise governed religious and political life. It's as if the Supreme Court and the Senate and the Vatican were all one building and body. It was literally the center of the world around which everything revolved for Jews. It was also newly rebuilt by King Herod and the most awe-inspiring building within hundreds of miles.

And as the disciples came out of the building one last time, they marveled at the temple's grandeur and beauty and said so to Jesus who wrecked their high by telling them it would all come tumbling down.

This reminds me of my time in Rome when I was in seminary back in 2001. Everywhere I turned my head, there was something for me to marvel at-- ancient statues and buildings, grand cathedrals filled with granite and artwork, all reaching a pinnacle when I went to the Vatican and was able to behold St. Peter's basilica. The grandeur, history and beauty were awe-inspiring.

But an interesting thing kept happening. I was overcome by a sense of things not being quite right, even in the middle of greatness. All of the richness around me, literally and historically, but what about the poor? And why was I so fortunate? And how was this related to my future? I felt kind of small and unworthy and had to take time to sit and pray every time I went into a cathedral.

I think the disciples were feeling a kind of high about the temple and their future role in the temple. They still thought Jesus would rise into power there. And Jesus brought them back down by letting them know that all of these great buildings would come tumbling down and they would end up persecuted by the powerful rather than in league with them.

This Word was the pinnacle of all that had taken place at the temple the last few days— 1. overturning the tables of those selling animals for sacrifices; 2. being doubted by one group of political and religious elite after another; 3. his accusing the teachers of the Law of turning the temple into a den of robbers which cared next to nothing about the orphan and the widow; 4. and telling them that they were wrong about their understanding of the Messiah, among other things.

Jesus' prophecy about the temple made explicit all that his works and words over the last week had hinted at. Israel's betrayal of the weak and exaltation of might would lead to chaos in Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

False Messiahs would be a part of this. There was tremendous messianic expectation in Jesus' day and it was thought that only a great military liberator and conqueror, a true Son of King David, could free Israel; from Roman oppression. So it was usually zealous military leaders who were called Messiahs by their followers. And their zeal for power and for overthrowing the enemy were the primary cause of Jerusalem's destruction in 70 a.d.

Jesus had pointed out an interesting Psalm of King David to the teachers of the Law that suggests that the Messiah was already David's Lord all those years ago when he wrote it. So while the Messiah would descend from David, he was always much more than a great general, priest and king. The idea that the Messiah was already at God's side hundreds of years earlier really amazed the crowds.

This leads us to the good news regarding the temple which comes from the gospel of John who points out that the temple which would be destroyed did not just refer to the one on Jerusalem. It referred also to the body of Jesus.

Jesus knew the implications of throwing himself into the heart of Jerusalem's religious and political life with a prophetic Word of grave warning and judgment. And it seems that in some mysterious way, he knew that the judgment ahead for Jerusalem and the temple was in his immediate future.

No doubt he would throw himself into the middle of the fray in our nation regarding all kinds of things, especially those things about which we assert our own power and rights and neglect the weak. And after Friday's shooting guns come to mind.

A couple of stats hit me yesterday. A Duke psychiatrist who has done a lot of work regarding mental illness and access to guns spoke of how 1 in 10* Americans has impulsive rage in which they are prone to break things and/ or hurt when angry. When we combine this stat with the fact that 1 in 3 American homes has guns in them, there's no surprise that we have had nearly a thousand mass shootings since Newtown (most of them within homes and families because of the combination of rage, illness, guns, and the erosion of meaning.) [Jeffrey Swanson, Duke University, both stats from PBS News' Hour]

I believe in hunting and the right to own rifles and I do not have any great solution. But I know that apathy or shoulder-shrugging or accepting the status quo is not an option for Christians. Jesus went into the center of power and demanded peace, compassion, sacrifice and non-violence and Love, even at tremendous cost. And when the powerful could not accept this and finally came after him in the Garden, Peter came to his defense, only to be stopped by Jesus who told him, "Those who live by the sword will die by it. Don't you know I could call down more than twelve legions of angels?"

And then after confronting the powerful with the demands of Love, Jesus went to the cross in order to concretely reveal God's judgment to the world, proclaiming, "This is where anger, aggression, condemnation, war and violence lead! To the death of the innocent." Jesus was able to do all of this because he trusted in His Father's eternal Love and the promise of resurrection.

His last teaching in the temple was the praise of a poor widow who gave all that she had to live on to the temple whose leaders would not care for her as they should. Jesus seems to be saying about her, "She completely trusts in God and wants to bless her leaders, even though they do not seem to care for her."

Jesus did the same on the night of his trial at the temple-- "Here is my body, given for you." This is the best news to us on this World Communion Sunday, even as we find ourselves trapped in a world of sin and death. May we be convicted and thus grow in the fierce and fearless Love of our Messiah. And doing so, may we enter the public sphere with the fierce Love that will force others to wonder— and at least consider the Way of a Messiah whose Love alone will save them from the sin and death within and around them.

Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive all honor, glory and power and God's people say....

