

Sermon for 14 November 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 1:4-20; Psalter 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Hebrews 10:11-25;

Mark 13:1-8

“Beginning”

As if we didn't have enough to worry about, now the Bible rolls out a whole new line of surprises.

First, we're told “democracy” ... in quotations ... is done for. “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.” The Book of Ruth, which we read just before All Saints Sunday, was set in “the time of Judges”, and the passage I just quoted was Judges 21:25.

Then, as if to solve that situation, we get both a first lesson and a substitute for a psalter reading about a strong-willed woman who appeals to Jahweh when nothing else works, and who promises, if she is given the only kind of power available to females in her society ... a son ... that she will dedicate him for life to Jahweh.

It's enough to make you think God will use the most far-fetched means to change things among humans into a better prospect, a more hopeful future.

Let's level with ourselves: Isn't that our message these days? Work on climate change isn't going fast enough, as the news from Glasgow tells us. Every time we think “Black Lives Matter” is getting somewhere, Baltimore's murder rate gets worse, and even a walk around Lake Montebello can get you worried for your personal safety by some obnoxious teen-agers, to say nothing of the way people drive in the city as we come to church.

Isn't that what today's passage from the early church preaches? The Letter to the Hebrews, which we've been reading consecutively for many weeks now, says what we We descendants of the people of Israel, we Jews ... have been depending on, with our central temple in Jerusalem and our routine of animal sacrifices ... we are going to give up those essential practices and just count on Torah, advice and promises and practical application in our day-to-day living Isn't that really what Hebrews is declaring, as it looks at Judaism in the first century A.D. ... with the addition of our solution as Christians of making Jesus the final solution? Everything's changing ... and both Jews and we off-shoot “people of the way” are “getting with the new program” in one way or another.

Then we close with a really uncharacteristic passage from Mark, in which Jesus waxes apocalyptic, sits down opposite the Jerusalem temple and confuses his disciples by promising what really did happen Just a few

years after his death ... when the Romans came and totally destroyed the Jerusalem temple and did their best to annihilate the Jewish people entirely.

My yoga teacher often reminds us, after teaching us a new posture or guiding us yet one more time through a familiar pattern of breathing or reaching up or lying down, so that we moan and ask how many more things do we have to learn to get good at it all She says when they get through a session, the yogi teachers always say, "Ah, yes, and after this, yoga." In other words, "Do it some more."

What we want to hear today ... what scripture is urging and signing and pushing us to get going with ... is to face, even more than we already do, the change we must make, the differences more than we even grasp yet, that make up our days and nights and will surely surround the lives of our children and those of us who keep extending the lifespan further and further past those of our mothers and fathers and sisters and cousins and ...

We are to begin. That is our task ... our fundamental outlook ... the position we occupy as a fellowship following Jesus in his risen presence among us.

Just recently I've been working again on my "inner child." You know the theory: No matter how loving our parents were, they did things that bent us and we're still discovering traits that hinder our loving and prospering... and unless I can say to myself, when you tick me off or I fall apart or raise a hand to do some damage, "Little Dan, that's because you're still hurting from something that no longer matters, and I'll not let that happen to you again ... I love you all the time, I'll care for you ..." Doesn't that sound made up? ...but I've finally been trying it, and it works. The love of God, the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, come through new ways every generation, and this "inner child" or "inner young man or woman" that still hangs me up can learn to heal, and be freed to expand in fresh and larger directions, with techniques such as this, just as medicine and surgery and wise dieting can improve our souls and bodies in ways we never knew before ... or better said, some of the scripture we never really heard can come alive with the Holy Spirit's power, just as it did in the original times when the church got started and the sacrament became alive and bonding to the first believers.

So, let us use these texts, and the thoughts they stir up within each of us, and these moments of gathering that mean so much to us each week ... let us use all these resources, all this energy collected and brought to life in fresh ways ... to begin, to believe we are treasured, beautiful creatures, to trust that what we do to help one another and the larger world beyond our doors, is fundamentally important to what the good Lord is so mysteriously and surprisingly about, this day, as in all the days before, and in all that is to come.

Let us begin.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.