*Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen*

Good morning! Good morning at home!

If we had sat down a few weeks ago and just read through the eleventh through thirteenth chapters of Saint Mark's account of the Gospel, we'd have a real sense of drama and tension. Jesus had entered into Jerusalem, having made that modest Palm Sunday procession. And he'd made his way to the temple at Jerusalem and had caused all sorts of commotion while he kicked out money changers and reminded anyone who would listen that the house of God is a house of prayer. A couple of weeks ago, we talked about how Jesus was in open verbal conflict with the religious authorities of the day, people like the scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees. Again, reading through the whole story at once, you get a sense of what Jesus' final week in ministry was like; it was heady and challenging. And much of it took place at this really important place for Jesus and his friends and family: the temple.

Which is all to say, things are really ratcheting up in intensity for Jesus and his friends as Christ's passion loomed over the narrative horizon. In today's Gospel lesson, we read about Jesus making his way out of the temple complex. All of that intensity from the past few hours, perhaps days of activity would have been fresh on his mind and stirring his heart. I suspect his sense of his own Messianic vocation was especially clear as he saw first-hand the problems of the temple and those that served there. It's a little bit funny to me then, that with all of that angst, all of that drama, one of his dudes walks up to him with stars in his eyes and just basically says: "Whoa the temple sure is neat! Look how big it is!"

That tracks of course. It was a pretty impressive place. It's almost an understatement to say that it was super important to Israelite faith and identity. The topic of the temple, its imagery, and its importance to how Israel understood and related to God is one that has filled countless books, some of them are even in the Biblical canon. But suffice it to say that the Temple was, at the time of Jesus, the culmination of a thematic element in Israel's story stretching all the way back to Eden. It's where God's people met with God, where they performed the most sacred rites, where the people made their offerings for atonement, where they trusted that God would be with them. So yeah, that impressed disciple was maybe a little overenthusiastic for the mood at the time, but he was certainly right to be impressed.

But Jesus didn't have time for it. Just as soon as Jesus' disciple marveled at the grandeur of the temple, Jesus points out that all the big buildings will be thrown down, nothing left. The big cool building would be nothing better than a heap of stone. Now, unsurprisingly, Jesus' disciples were pretty unsettled. What sort of prediction was Jesus making? Was he being literal? Was he being metaphorical? Was he just salty after having so many arguments? I suspect that Peter, James, John, and Andrew were asking lots of questions like these as they approached Jesus for some clarity. Jesus had just kind of blithely said that the most important structure in the Israelite world was going to be destroyed *again*; this was big news. They were right to be curious, absolutely spot on for being concerned.

"When is this going down, what sign will help us know what to expect," they asked him. Jesus' answer seems like a non-answer at first; but perhaps it’s more like he's answering another question, a question that lies behind the disciples' concern. When Jesus tells the disciples that things are going to be pretty wild; with wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, and various natural peril, he threw in that there will be people who will distract or claim that they themselves are the messiah. Jesus will have none of it. Despite the apparent destruction of the temple (which *would* happen; the Romans destroyed the temple in the year 70), despite all the crazy things that would happen around the disciples (then and now), Jesus would have his disciples' hearts and minds fully committed to him and his work; not worried about how cool the temple is, not swayed or disheartened by the world's tumult.

And the disciples throughout the ages, would think and pray through the things that Jesus said and taught about himself, what he did for us in his ministry, in is cross and passion, and in his resurrection and ascension. The earliest Christian writers and pastors would realize that Jesus himself embodied the very promise that that temple represented to Israel; that he is what he said he is which is the very presence of God that Israel remembered and hope for, from Eden to tabernacle to temple. Jesus fulfills all the stuff that the Israelites looked for the temple by nature of his sacrifice on Calvary and in his constant intercession at the right hand of the Father. As a side note, among a couple other things, this is what the letter to the Hebrews is about. Sometime we should go through that text together.

In closing, I find a text like the one we had from Mark this morning to be tremendously encouraging and I pray that it might be for you as well. It's a reminder to stick close to Jesus, a reminder not to be overly distracted or confounded by all the stuff that militates against the peaceable Kingdom of the Messiah. It's a reminder, though perhaps indirectly, that Christ's promise is that he will always be with us, even unto the end of the age. It's a reminder that the work he gives us as his people, to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves is a work that stretches across the cares and occupations of the world, even the world as we know it in the year 2021. How this looks in Christian practice can vary among his people, but whenever I feel overwhelmed by what's happening in my news feed, or what rumor of war is present in my own life, I know that the Savior listens. I don't always come to him with my anxieties as I ought, but when I do, I know Christ has my ear. And when I speak to those wise and godly people, who know me, my heart, and have keener insight on how God is moving in life than I do, again I am comforted by the ministry of the Holy Spirit working through the kindness of the saints.

Therefore, I pray that the tumult of this current age encourages us to run into the open embrace of Jesus, who fills our heart with gladness and comfort such that we can share in the spirit of the Psalmist who wrote to God we worship today:

My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices; \*

my body also shall rest in hope.

For you (O Lord) will not abandon me to the grave, \*

nor let your holy one see the Pit.

 You will show me the path of life; \*

in your presence there is fullness of joy,

and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

To God be all glory from age to age. Amen.