

FIRST LESSON: Daniel 12:1-3
SECOND LESSON: Hebrews 10:11-14; 19-25
THE GOSPEL: Mark 13:1-8

Twenty-Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
November 18, 2018

“A Temple Talk”
Sermon Preached by Pastor Charles T. Paulson
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen

Well obviously you know which Sunday of the year this is – right? This is the 26th Sunday after Pentecost. And you know what? That’s an unusual Sunday to have, because there are very few 26 Sundays after Pentecost in our church lectionary status. The reason there are 26 this year is because Easter was on April 1, about as early as it can come. Pentecost is 50 days after Easter. Being with Easter so early, there is much more time before you get to Christ the King Sunday, and so we have 26 Sundays. Very seldom does that happen, and even very seldom do we have 25.

But here we are using the Scripture from the Gospel of Mark, it doesn’t come around very often in our pericopes. Mark, in his Gospel that I read today, makes reference to the temple in Jerusalem, and today we are going to talk about the temple. The title of my sermon if you saw it, is A Temple Talk. If you are Lutheran particularly, you have probably heard of many temple talks in churches. Temple talks are usually given by a lay person, a non-clergy person. Most often they are talking about stewardship, about giving. So the pastor turns that over to the lay people whenever he can. Most temple talks have nothing to do with the temple. Most often, like I said, are stewardship. This temple talk is not about stewardship, it’s about the temple.

If you know much about the history of the people of Israel and of course our whole Christian community comes out of the history of Israel and we have built upon that. The temple was the glory of Israel’s life, when they had one. The temple in Jerusalem was a place every Jew wanted to visit during their lifetime. When it came to Passover time, thousands and thousands and thousands of Jews would come from even distant countries just to be able to go to the temple to make their Passover sacrifice.

Today, thousands of Christians want to go to Jerusalem, to the Holy Land, to see that place where Jesus walked, and to view where the temple was. Only foundations are left. The Jews saw the temple as the dwelling place of God. The temple gave the Jews the assurance that God was in their presence. When Israel had a temple, they had a sense of a closeness of God

to them. And when they didn't have a temple, and that was a lot of the time, they felt uncertain where was God. Temples were not unique to the Jews. Other religions had them long before Israel had a temple. The Jews didn't have a temple until 1000 years before the coming of Jesus. The Jews had been in existence at the time of Jesus for 2000 years. Temples, for whatever religion they were built, were dedicated for the worship of deities or gods. For the Jews it was the worship of Yahweh, that personal name for their God. So today we look at that temple. And that's what Jesus and his disciples were doing when Jesus came out of the temple that day in Jerusalem. They were marveling at this wonderful structure that was there. Still today, people marvel when they look at the ruins of temples that have existed if you have been to Greece or Rome, Turkey or one of the Asian countries. Many times when you look at those ancient temples for the Greeks and the Romans, we see these huge stones and don't you wonder sometimes, they didn't have bulldozers, they didn't have cranes, but they put all these stones in place to make these beautiful buildings.

The disciples then said to Jesus, "Look teacher, what large stones and what large buildings." And then Jesus said to them, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another, all will be thrown down." That's quite a statement for Jesus to make about this beautiful place that the Jews had in Jerusalem. He told them the temple will be destroyed. What did the disciples want to know? When... When is this going to happen? And you know what, Jesus didn't tell them, he probably didn't even know. It's kind of like we find year after year prophecies of when the world is going to come to an end. People come up with dates when the world is going to end. They want to know that. Jesus didn't know, so how could some of these guys know today?

The temple that they were marveling at was built not too long before Jesus. That temple was the third temple that Israel had. The first two had already been destroyed. If you count the tabernacle, which preceded the temples when they were wandering in the wilderness, this was their fourth. This was called the temple of Herod. Maybe you aren't interested in some history, but you are going to get it anyway. The first temple, like I said, was built 1000 years before Jesus. It was Solomon's temple. Solomon built the temple. David, his father, collected the materials for that temple, but it was Solomon who was the builder. That temple lasted almost 400 years, and then it was destroyed by the Babylonians between 596 and 587 BC. They devastated the Jews, and they were carried off into captivity into Babylon. Fifty years later, Zerubabel went back from Babylon and built another temple in Jerusalem. He had trouble getting people to help him, but they put together another temple, using much of the materials that had been used in the temple before that. That temple was destroyed in about 1168 BC. I don't expect you to remember dates, that's not important. The third temple was the temple of Herod at the time of Jesus. That temple that Jesus and the disciples were looking at that made Jesus comment on that date of destruction. That temple lasted, after Jesus made this prediction, about 40 years after Jesus was gone. That temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Now the Jews had been in existence for 2000 years at the time of Christ. They only had a

temple about a fourth of the time of their history. Like I said, they existed 1000 years before they had a temple.

It wasn't until 1300 BC that Israel got an organized religion. It doesn't mean that they had a disorganized religion before that, but this is the first time it had specific type of leaders. Before that it had no structure, but about 1300 BC the priesthood was established. They were there at the tabernacle during the wilderness wanderings. Now that tabernacle and the temple had a number of divisions and if you look into the dictionary of the Bible, usually you will find diagrams of the temple with all the various divisions in the temple. Sacrifices were made in the temple. Sacrifices were made by whom? Made by the priests. Blood sacrifices, sheep, goats, and even doves. The priesthood was a very high position. If you know Hebrew history, Aaron, the brother of Moses that led people of Israel out of Egypt, was the first high priest for the Jews. At the time of Jesus, the position of the high priest had become so important, and so powerful, that it was even higher than the king. And the high priest was appointed by the Romans who ruled at that particular time. It was a political appointment and the Romans wanted someone appointed who would be sympathetic to what Rome was doing, what the Emperor wanted. So politics aren't so different today than they were back then.

Anybody know who the Jewish high priest is today? Maybe you know the name of the Pope, but not the high priest. And the reason you don't know the name of the high priest, there isn't a high priest. Do you know any Jewish priests? No, they don't have them either. Why? Because they had no temple, because they have no temple. Because there are not sacrifices made.

The sermon I preached during the summer when most of you snow birds of course weren't around, and a lot of you others weren't here, I talked about the prophet Ezekiel, who was carried off into captivity into Babylon when the temple was destroyed in about 587 BC. Ezekiel was a priest in Jerusalem, but he couldn't be a priest in Babylon, why? They had no temple. So Ezekiel became a prophet. It was a lot easier being a priest than it was a prophet. A priest only had to do the rituals as far as their religion is concerned. The prophet got himself in trouble speaking out against the things that were going on. So it was easier to be a priest than a prophet.

I mentioned the position of the high priest, go back to the temple, there were lots of sections in the temple, like I said, they could be diagramed and such. They had several sections, the outward section was called the Courtyard of the Gentiles, anybody could go there. Inside of that was the Courtyard of Women, where women could go that far into the temple, men could go there as well. But the entrance was limited for them there. Inside the Courtyard of Women was the Holy Place. In the Holy Place, only priests could enter that Holy Place. Holy means set apart, and that part was set apart from others. Then there was the Holy of Holies – really set apart, set apart from everybody except one person, and that was the high priest. My

seminary professor of the Old Testament called this holy place the “Kabod of Yahweh”, the dwelling place of God. Like I said, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. To come into the closeness and the presence of God. That’s not the way it is for us.

Scripture for our second reading in the last couple of weeks mention the high priest. In our theology of Jesus, we see Jesus as being three things. Jesus was prophet, Jesus was high priest, and Jesus was King. Next Sunday we observe Christ the King Sunday. In the teachings that we find in the Gospel, we find Jesus the prophet. We see Jesus the high priest on Good Friday. So very very very important. When Christ came as high priest as the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tabernacle, he entered **once** for all into the Holy Place. Not with blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood. Thus obtaining eternal redemption. Some of you, but I’m sure not all of you, recall what happened in the temple the day Jesus died. What happened to the Holy of Holies place, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies where only the high priest could go, when Jesus died, was torn in half. Was torn in two and opened up the Holy of Holies. So not only the high priest, going into the presence of God, was no longer limited. That’s the Gospel, that’s the good news. We don’t have priests in the Lutheran church, we don’t need priests because we don’t make sacrifices. We don’t need someone to intervene between us and God. The curtain of the Holy of Holies was open. So we don’t need priests to help us go into the presence of God, and we don’t need Saints to do that either.

I don’t know if it’s a real story, but I think it’s a story that kind of relates to this whole business of truth about how God has been opened up to us. Probably this was in the Roman Church, and I don’t know if it’s real, but it makes a point. A person was asking about how you got forgiveness and connect with God. So he asked a friend in the church and he said, “Well how do you do that?” So he said he took his sins to the priest. And then the man said, “So what does he do with them?” He said, “He went to the bishop.” And what did the bishop do with them? He went to the cardinal. What did the cardinal do? He went to the pope. And what did the pope do? The pope went to God. And then the man said, “That’s what I’m doing.”

We are God’s temple, God within us.