

A New and Living Way

By Linda Rex

November 17, 2024, Proper 28 | After Pentecost—This year as we have walked through the Revised Common Lectionary passages, I have been mostly focusing on the New Testament passage, while drawing upon the other passages where they have been appropriate. Today, though, in the light of tomorrow being the 2024 election day here in America, I will begin with the Gospel passage, Mark 13:1–8. I will bring in the New Testament passage from Hebrews later in this blog.

In the gospel for this Sunday, Jesus was leaving the temple when one of his disciples began pointing out the architectural merits and wonders of the building. Jesus was not impressed. He immediately remarked that a time was coming when every stone would be leveled, a statement of hyperbole prophetically pointing to what would happen in 70 AD when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans.

Since the disciples, as usual, did not seem to get the point, they began asking about what the sign would be when all that was predicted would come to pass. Jesus turned their attention instead to what their motives were. They were looking for someone to save them from their Roman oppressors. They were looking for a messiah who would rescue them and make them an independent nation using violent means. But Jesus told them not to seek rescue and salvation from human saviors, for they will always end up misleading the people who follow them, using evil means to defeat evil. And Jesus told the disciples that wars, famines, international disputes were all part of the birth pangs leading up to the establishment of God's new heaven and earth. They were not to be distressed by any of these things, but to understand that they were all part of the process of God's redemption of his creation.

Jesus' message is just as appropriate today as it was back then. Even to this day, there have been leaders who claimed that they would bring about a new world, a new government, and the salvation of their people. Some of these even led a military revolt, or the establishment of a new government. Many looked real good at the beginning, because they knew what things to tell people in order to get a following. But when they eventually began to run things their way, it soon became apparent that they were no savior or messiah—they were merely another faulty human who was leading everyone astray.

In the light of this reality, we are reminded of our New Testament passage, Hebrews 10:11–14, 19–25. In this the author contrasts the daily efforts of the Old Testament Aaronic priest, who, in spite of his diligent efforts, was never able to take away the sins of the people. In contrast, Jesus offered himself, once for all. By this self-offering, Jesus “perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

There is only one Person who is able to take away our sins and perfect us before God. There is only one Person who delivers us and frees us from the tyrannies of this world. There is only one Person who enables us, “by a new and living way,” through his flesh, to enter into God's presence. Because of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done, we draw near to God in faith, cleansed and purified, and made whole.

We are reminded that though human kingdoms rise and fall, human leaders rise and fall, and the world seems to be falling into chaotic disarray at times, Jesus Christ does not change. He does not fail us. He is present now by his Spirit, and is interceding for us with his Father on our behalf. There is nothing that cannot be brought to Jesus, and through him to his Father in the Spirit. Whatever is happening in this world, no matter how the election turns out, we have hope that God is still at work bringing to pass his ends and purposes. He will, in time, defeat all his

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enemies, and they are as good as defeated even now, for he is taking all that is meant for evil and turning it to accomplish his perfect, good will in this world.

As we make our way to the voting booth, and as we work our way through this transition of government, there is one thing we can be sure of: When we go to God with humble hearts and ask him to rescue and save us, and to work all things for our good, he will hear us and respond. May we have the humility and grace to pray to God about all that is going on, and trust in the faithful love and grace of Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

Heavenly Father, as we face significant changes in our world and our nation, we turn to you and ask you to take all things into your loving hands and to work them out for our good. Thank you, Jesus, that we can come to you in faith, and know you are interceding on our behalf. We are in need of your rescue and salvation in every moment. May your Spirit move in us, in our lives, and in our circumstances, to accomplish your perfect will, in Jesus name. Amen.

“Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, ‘sat down at the right hand of God,’ waiting from that time onward ‘until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.’ For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. ... Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:11–14 (15–18) 19–25 NASB

“As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.’ As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?’ And Jesus began to say to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, “I am He!” and will mislead many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.’” Mark 13:1–8 NASB