

The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. Robert Malm
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“Last Things First”

Jesus knew he didn't have much time left. He didn't know when or where or who, but he did predict his arrest, suffering and death prior to entering Jerusalem. Mark's Gospel gives us the record of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the 11th chapter. Shortly after, Jesus went into the great Temple and began driving out those selling animals for sacrifice and the money changers. He said, “You have made this house of prayer into a den of thieves...” (11:17). This was the “last straw” for the chief priests and scribes, so they sought to arrest him and execute him.

Jesus' last teachings take place during these final days in Jerusalem. Large crowds gathered in and around the Temple. In today's Gospel Jesus and his disciples come out of the Temple for the last time. In a few verses we will hear about the chief priests' plan to arrest Jesus at night, when there are no crowds around; and how they give money to Judas to betray Jesus.

Jesus knew he didn't have much time left, so when the disciples pointed to the Temple in awe and said, “What large stones and great buildings,” Jesus used this as an opportunity to share some last words before his arrest and crucifixion.

His main teaching on this occasion, as it had been throughout his ministry and as it would be during his Passion was trust in God. Do not put your trust in temples built by human hands; do not trust in religious and political leaders; do not trust in laws and regulations, no matter how sacred; do not trust in other human beings. Trust in God; trust in God's love, God's salvation.

So, this basic teaching led Jesus to warn his disciples about those who come as leaders. Be careful who you give authority to – who you follow. Make sure your leaders, religious and political, act out of a concern for God's love, God's justice, God's peace. Do not follow those who care only about their own worldly interests.

Lastly, Jesus taught that God was in control of the future, of time to come. As we know, Jesus told his disciples immediately before his Ascension, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority...” (Acts 1:7). Trusting in God means not being anxious about the future. Live each day fully, faithfully, truthfully. Be on the alert; watch for God's coming, for God's revelation; resist evil.

As Mark and the other synoptic Gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, recorded the last words of Jesus some 30-40 years after his Death and Resurrection, Jerusalem and the Holy Land was torn by war and conflict. The zealots within Judaism had finally grown powerful enough to lead an armed revolution against Rome. Eventually, Roman power prevailed, many were killed and to punish the Jews, the Roman authorities had the great and beautiful Temple destroyed. Jesus' last words were for his disciples; they were for the first generation of Christians, and they are for us today.

We hear this apocalyptic teaching as we come to the end of the liturgical year. Next Sunday we celebrate Christ the King, and the kingdom of God's reign. Two weeks from today we begin the new liturgical year on Advent Sunday. Advent is our time to prepare for Christ's coming.

We don't know how much time we have... I sometimes wonder what my last words would be? As we saw yesterday at a requiem for our long-time member Carl Seward, sometimes the requiem service is

a “last word.” Carl designed the entire service – the readings, the hymns, who would be involved, where he would be buried. All this was his last teaching for us.

We don't know what the future will bring. We do know that if we trust in God and live each day fully by God's grace, God will lead us, support us into the future. Our faithfulness today will prepare us for anything tomorrow brings.