

Mark 13:1-8

As they leave the temple, Jesus' disciples are awed by the size and beauty of the building, but Jesus predicts that it will be destroyed. When the disciples ask for a sign, Jesus warns them about false messiahs who will come, reports of war, earthquakes, and famines. But, these, he explains, are just the beginnings of the end.

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

There will be wars, and rumours of wars, and wars that will shake the foundations of the world and your faith in humanity. There will be death. There will be disaster. There will be all manner of things in this life to rattle your soul. There will be worry, anxiety, fear, hatred, racism, injustice, terrorism. There will be wars and rumours of war, but it is not the end of the world. The world ends not with flames and terror, blood and carnage. That's not what our faith tells us. That's not what Jesus tells us today in the wake of violence and terrorism. He tells us, "The end is yet to come. Fear not. This is not how the world ends."

The world ends with peace, not violence. And that is the end of the world we look forward to. The end of this violent world, birthing a peaceful one. The end of an impoverished world, birthing a just one. The end of a hateful world, birthing a world pulsing with love. Peace birthed from the depths of violence is a holy child indeed, because violence begets violence.

Come, God our great midwife in the midst of our world's birth pangs and laboured groans for renewal. Come, help us birth a new world. *(David Henson)*

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Violence, destruction, war and ridicule are common troubles that we all face in the world - perhaps even more so as we seek to follow Christ. The temptation is to respond in kind, offering violence for violence and using force to overcome force. However, the way of Christ, revealed through the Scriptures, is the way of peace, forgiveness, and faith in God's ultimate justice. This way is demonstrated by Hannah's prayers in the face of Peninnah's taunts (and in her song when she presents Samuel at the temple). In a time when children were wealth, Peninnah's mockery of Hannah was as much about power as it was about womanhood. It is interesting that, in Mark's Gospel, Jesus' warnings are associated with the disciples' awe at the temple building, which represented wealth and power (both of a spiritual and political nature, although Jesus revealed in his life and death that the latter seemed to have become more prominent). It is when we get absorbed in the trappings of power and wealth that we become violent and oppressive. The way of "powerless peace" that Jesus demonstrated, which brings us into right relationship with God, and enables us to support and encourage one another presents a stark contrast to these violent power plays.

In a world in which war and violence are a constant reality, humanity desperately needs to learn two things. First, we need to relinquish our addiction to wealth and power, which inevitably creates both competition and oppression - winners and losers. Second, we need to embrace the Jesus way of "powerless peace", in which we trust in God's justice and love, even when the world seems to be descending into chaos and anarchy. The way of peace is not a "quick-fix" alternative to injustice. Nor is it an apathetic, inactive resignation which accepts reality without trying to change it. It is a painful, sacrificial journey that takes a long view of human history. When peacemaking rises up against violence and injustice, things often get worse, and oppressors and tyrants use greater violence and threats to try and silence the peace and justice making.

But, when we remain steadfast in our faith that God is at work in our world, and that God's purposes of justice and peace will continue to overcome violence and oppression, we can absorb the pain, refuse to respond in kind, carry the cross, and ultimately wait until, as inevitably must happen, God's Commonwealth prevails.

(John van de Laar, Sacredise)

A litany from Psalm 16

A Psalm in praise of God's protection and blessing, God's instruction and guidance.

You are LORD; we have no good apart from you.

You delight in us, by the mystery of your grace.

Though life is broken in bits and pieces,
you are our piece and our portion.

**Though life pours itself out in rage and tragedy,
you are our water and our cup.**

Let us bless the LORD,
who walks with us as we wander.

**Let us praise the LORD,
who whispers a lullaby when the nights grow long.**

Follow God faithfully, no matter the chaos;

For God does not lose track of us. God alone has power over hell.

God alone shows us the path of life;

God is our resurrection and our renewal.

**In God's presence there is fullness of joy, the multiplication of
peace, and satisfaction forevermore.** (Source: Rachel Hackenberg)

1 Samuel 1:4-20

Hannah grieves her inability to conceive, and the mockery of Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah, so when the family goes to the temple she prays for a child. After Eli accuses her of being drunk, she explains that she is grieving and he blesses her. Following this, she falls pregnant and gives birth to Samuel.

On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. She made this vow: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your

servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head." As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer. They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord."

Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God," and since then has been waiting "until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet." For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.