

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Gospel Year B

GOD'S GRAND DESIGN

Mark 13:1-8

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Bruce K Modahl

1As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" 2Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." 3When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished? 5Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 6Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. 7When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8For 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.



The cross and empty tomb are the hinges upon which the ages turn. In the final step of God's creative design, God will wipe away every tear.

DIAGNOSIS: Humility

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Oooh, Look at the Big Buildings

The towering buildings loom like canyon walls over the relatively narrow road that is Wall Street in lower Manhattan. They say you can spot the small-town tourists because they are looking up and walking slow.

The Galilean disciples' reaction to the temple was something like that. The reader can almost hear the frustration in Jesus' reprimand. He has been trying to teach them that God's presence is not located in the temple, but in him.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): The Dow Giveth and the Dow Taketh Away; Blessed Be the Name of the Dow

There are contemporary equivalents to seeking God's presence in that which is not God. It looks something like this:

–The bridal couple insists on changing their wedding vows from “as long as we both shall live” to “forever and ever.”

–The family asks the organist to play “Stars and Stripes Forever,” as the prelude for their father's funeral.

–The church foundation committee encourages contributions to the church endowment fund because it will pay out to the church forever.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Ashes, Ashes, All Fall Down

None of the influences or institutions we look to for guarantees can provide it. In this current phase of God's creative design, the whole cosmos comes with an expiration date. We don't know our own death date. How can we expect to know when “all will be thrown down”?



PROGNOSIS: The Beginning of the Birth Pangs

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The Firm Foundation

If we follow only the science, there is nothing more after the final crunch or evanescence. If we follow the promise of Jesus' death and resurrection, we look forward to the consummation of God's creative design. The cross and empty tomb are the hinges upon which the ages turn. In the final step of God's creative design, God will wipe away every tear. Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away (Rev. 21:4).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): The Lord Giveth and the Lord Taketh Away; Blessed Be the Name of the Lord

By Jesus' death and resurrection, God takes away our sins. The Lord gives us life eternal. It is his to give. He is trustworthy. We can depend on him.

Consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer's confession of faith in the hymn

"By Gracious Powers" (ELW 626). The final verse reads,
By gracious pow'rs so faithfully protected,
so quietly, so wonderfully near,
we live each day in hope with you beside us,
and go with you through every passing year.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Looking Ahead

Hilary Mantel's historical novel, *The Mirror and the Light*, takes place during the reign of Henry VIII of England. The novel chronicles the final years of Thomas Cromwell's life. As Cromwell faces execution, he says to himself, "If a man should live as if every day is his last, he should also die as if there is a day to come, and another after that."

For a parable on what it means to live both with confidence in the nearness of the end and with uncertainty as to the day and hour, look forward to Mark 13:33-37. We won't tread on next Sunday's sermon material. This is all of chapter 13 we get.