

*Sermon: The Sky is Falling*  
*Text: Mark 13:1 – 8*  
*Date: November 15, 2009*  
*Place: Jesup First UMC*

Everybody in the office knew Susie didn't date a lot. Oh, she was a sweet girl and pretty too, but she just didn't get out there enough. So, they decided to set her up on a blind date for Friday Night. And she was so excited as she anticipated dinner at a five star restaurant with live music and dancing. And she spent all day getting ready. She had her hair done; she had her nails done – fingers and toes; she picked out the perfect dress; and finally, she did her makeup. Then, she went downstairs and waited ... and waited and waited ... but he never showed. So, after about an hour, she went upstairs, took off the makeup ... and the dress, let her hair down, and put on her PJs. Then, she went to the frig and pulled out a gallon of Ben –n– Jerry's and plopped down in front of the television. That's when the doorbell rang. And she looked through the peep hole and there stood a handsome young man with flowers in his hand. And without thinking, she snatched the door open and he took one look at her and said: "*What? I gave you an extra 90 minutes and you're still not ready?*"

Do you remember where you were that morning? I was working in the office at Buena Vista with Mrs. Carolyn when Mr. Raymond called. He said some dummy just flew a plane into one of the twin towers. And so, I rushed home just in time to see the second plane hit the other tower. We were all shocked and horrified, but we shouldn't have been. You see, we had been warned. When they bombed the Marine barracks

in Syria, when they took the American Embassy in Iran, when they bombed the USS Cole, when they bombed the Trade Center in 1993, they were sending a warning and we still weren't ready!

In our text this morning, we find Jesus and the disciples visiting the Temple during the last week of His earthly life. And as they were leaving the Temple, one of the disciples said: "*Teacher, just look at these beautiful buildings.*" And Jesus said: "*I tell you the truth: the day is coming when not one stone will be left upon another in this place; they will all be thrown down.*" So, that got the disciples to thinking, and later, when they were sitting together, they asked Jesus: "*When is this going to happen and what sign can we look for to tell us the end is near?*" And Jesus said: "*Don't let anyone deceive you for many will try. Don't be shocked about wars and rumors of war. Don't get upset about earthquakes or famines, because this is only the beginning of things to come.*"

Now, what might Jesus be teaching us through this passage?

***First, Jesus proclaims the end of Temple Worship!*** He said: "*I tell you the truth, one day, not one stone will be found upon another in this place. They will all be thrown down.*" Now, Israel's Temple was the center of their national identity and their religion. In the first century, the Temple complex stretched over 35 acres. The Temple itself was made of marble and cedar overlaid with gold. Josephus says, when the sun rose in the eastern sky and beat down upon the Temple, the glare was blinding. It was remarkable, but for all of its size and beauty, it still represented dead religion.

You see, traditionally, the Temple was the dwelling place of God. It was the place where people met with God, where they showed their love and devotion to Him, where they offered sacrifices to atone for their sins. But in Jesus' day, the priesthood was corrupt and the Temple had become a place of business, a place of power and control, where people walked through the motions of religion without any true relationship with God at all.

That's why God sent Jesus. The sacrificial system was being replaced a better sacrifice. Jesus came to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. Now there was a better Temple, the person of Jesus Christ for "*In Him was the fullness of God pleased to dwell.*" Now, there was a better priesthood, for He is "our Great High Priest" who enters into the Holy of Holies to offer His own blood for the sins of the world.

Everything that Israel's Temple had been Jesus now was and Israel's religion was finished.

But, like always, the disciples misunderstood. He said the Temple would be torn down and they heard, "*The sky is falling; the sky is falling!*" And so they asked Him about it. And Jesus gives them a word of warning and a word of comfort.

***First, He warns them about false messiahs!*** He said: "*Don't let anyone deceive you for many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Messiah," and they will deceive many.*"<sup>1</sup> The list of would-be messiahs is endless. Since the day Satan lead an uprising against God, there have always been pretenders to the throne. During the first century, there were many who either

claimed to be the Messiah or were proclaimed to be the Messiah by those who followed them. Ironically, one of those men was Vespasian, the man who was emperor when Jerusalem was destroyed. The historian Josephus tells us that Vespasian claimed to be the savior of the Jewish people.

Even in our day, there have been those who lead people astray in the name of Jesus. Some, because of their sinfulness and brokenness, have done great damage to the church. Others – like Jim Jones and David Koresh – have proclaimed themselves to be modern incarnations of Christ. And many have been deceived.

Jesus warns us about pretenders to the throne.

***Third, Jesus comforts us in the midst of our suffering.*** I like the way ***The Message*** paraphrases these verses: ***“When you hear of wars and rumored wars, keep your head and don’t panic. This is routine history, and no sign of the end. Nation will fight nation and ruler fight ruler, over and over. Earthquakes will occur in various places. There will be famines. But these things are nothing compared to what’s coming.”***

Now, there’s something about us that wants to know, isn’t there? Like the disciples, we want to know what the signs are; we want to be able to mark it on our calendar, because in reality we’re procrastinators. There’s something tremendously tempting about skimming by by the skin of your teeth. But Jesus doesn’t give us a series of unique signs of the end; He just tells us things are going to continue to be like they’ve always been. Human suffering will continue;

there will be wars and earthquakes and famines. But Jesus tells us: “Don’t be anxious; don’t panic; when the end comes, you’ll know it.”

There’s a word of comfort in the midst of our suffering.

So, what exactly is the message of Mark 13? Well, actually it’s the same as the Boy Scout motto: “*Be prepared.*” “Don’t be lead astray; don’t panic,” but be prepared for Jesus said: “But the exact day and hour? No one knows that, not even heaven’s angels, not even the Son, only the Father. So keep a sharp lookout, for you don’t know the timetable.”<sup>ii</sup> If you don’t know when, be ready always.

There is a castle in Northern Italy where the grounds are kept in perfect order. You see, the same man has been tending the grounds there for many years. And guess what? The owner of the castle never visits. One day a tour guide was leading a group through the castle and she explained that the owner of the castle had never seen the facility and that got one man to thinking. So he walked over to the gardener and said: “*My dear sir, you keep this place in such fine condition. It’s almost as though you expect your master to come tomorrow.*” And he smiled and said: “*Sir, my job is to keep it as if I expected him today.*”<sup>iii</sup>

And so must we ...

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> New Living Translation

<sup>ii</sup> Verse 32, **The Message**

<sup>iii</sup> **Aha Magazine**, Wood Lake Books, Kelowna BC, Canada