

Proper 28 Year B 1 Samuel (Hannah) and Mark 13:1-8 (Apocalypse)

When I was in sixth grade, I learned that the Romans were the best civil engineers of their era and that after the fall of the Roman Empire, western civilization lost the Roman technology for 1,000 years. Some time later I visited my family in England. While there I saw Hadrian's wall in the northern part of the country and went to Bath, in the south eastern part of England, where I not only walked in the footsteps of Jane Austen, I also saw the Roman Baths and the ruined aqueducts. I saw for myself that the Romans truly were master engineers and builders. Perhaps at that time, the seeds were planted for my career in urban planning.

Almost three years ago, I was privileged to be able to travel to Israel. I discovered Hadrian's Wall there as well. Romans had to be master builders if they built a wall from Asia all across Europe! It makes the wall we're building at the U.S. Mexico boarder seem unambitious.

I was even more impressed with Roman technology and feats of engineering when I saw the massive public works projects of Harod the Great. Harod is styled "the great" because of his building projects. Harod built an enormous mausoleum where the remains of Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Rebecca and Leah are interred. This mausoleum is

more than a city block in size and is at least four stories tall. This is a building created with hand tools and slave labor. It is an amazing piece of architecture.

In Caesarea Maritima, Harod dredged a harbor into the Mediterranean Sea, a harbor that can still be used today. Adjacent to it, he built a sports arena and an amphitheater. Having more than a passing familiarity with engineering drawings and the modern equipment necessary to create such things, I shake my head in wonder. How was it even possible for these things to have been built with just hand tools?

The jewel in Harod the Great's crown, was the rebuilding of Solomon's Temple. It was a massive edifice, containing many buildings, an outer courtyard and an inner courtyard. It was meant to be opulent and awe inspiring and it achieved Harod's goal. Harod had created a splendid building to house the arc of the covenant, a building that rivals the most splendid cathedral in honoring God. The Temple was a place that was meant to last for the ages. Given that the pyramids are over 6,000 years old, this is not an unreasonable expectation. Given all this, it is not surprise that one of Jesus's disciples would remark on the

size of the stones used for the edifice, or the number of buildings that comprised the Temple complex.

And Jesus responds that these amazing structures will be destroyed. He then begins to describe a scene that is apocalyptic in nature. I can imagine that his listeners were bug eyed in disbelief.

For us to take in the enormity of what Jesus is suggesting, think of how you felt when you saw the World Trade Center Towers come crashing down, or when you saw images of the tsunami in Japan, or the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Perhaps we are numb with shock and disbelief at the mayhem and carnage caused on Thursday in Paris. What Jesus is suggesting is beyond awful. In our own time, when those predicting the end of the world point to these events as signs of the coming end times, my response is one of disbelief and disgust. The God I worship does not intentionally inflict harm on his creation.

Peter, James, John and Andrew do not appear to share my disgust, rather they are trying to take this all in, and they become pragmatic. Okay, Jesus, they might have said, when is this going to be happening? What should we be looking for to know that it's about to start, so we can be prepared? Of course, Jesus's answer is not directly on point. He warns them to beware of false teachers, of those who are sure to offer

the keys to salvation. For us today, such a false teacher might be someone like Senator Joe McCarthy, trying to contain the threat of communism against democracy.

Although not recorded in so many words, Jesus responds to the disciples by telling them that focusing on signs is beside the point. He is helping them to see that although the Temple is regarded as the holy of holies among the Jewish people, true worship is not occurring there. He urges his followers to be vigilant and to keep following Jesus' word and example even when chaos and evil appear all around them. They are able to keep calm in the face of such evil, in the face of violence we inflict upon one another, or even in the face of our helplessness in the midst of a natural disaster, because God's judgment and rescue of humanity is sure.

Central to our Christian belief is that through Jesus, God acted to save his creation. Our theology is born out of Jewish apocalyptic thought that the world became so evil that only God can save it. As we've been waiting for the fulfillment of God's Kingdom, it also follows that God will rescue the world at a time God chooses and in the new creation, all that reside therein will be righteous. We believe that God has begun His rescue in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

This salvation is not reserved for our life after we have left our mortal body. Salvation is offered to us in the here and now, not as a one time take or leave it event, rather it is the work of a lifetime. Our faith, our following Jesus' word and example, teaches us how to forgive and how we amend our own lives. Our faith teaches us how to love God and how to love our neighbor. I hope that our faith also teaches us that we can trust that God is in control, that God resides in every moment, in every action or reaction, and that even in the midst of terrible destruction, the seeds of new life are planted and will grow.

If we believe that God is in control, then we can wholeheartedly embrace Hannah's Song, which we said this morning as our Canticle. In it we hear that Hannah sees God's power in everything that happens, that ultimately God will right what is wrong, that God judges justly, responds to the needy, topples the oppressor, and maintains the world. Hannah understands that God's actions support human freedom and facilitate moral responsibility. Her song is not hers alone; the song is for all of God's people, urging us to worship God and to acknowledge that every good gift's source is attributable to God. The events in Hannah's life offer us an example of the need for endurance, patience, perseverance and hope. Our response to that is a song such as hers,

always offering thanks and praise to God, acknowledging the gifts God graciously gives, sustaining hope for God's continuing and typically surprising provision for the future.

Jesus' counsel to remain calm in the face of unsettling calamity and Hannah's joyful exuberance are difficult to live into. The more we are able to believe and act on our belief, the easier it is to be calm and express thanksgiving in even the most difficult of circumstances. We as a parish are facing such a challenge and an opportunity to act in faith.

As you are aware from my e-mail blast, the Vestry last week endorsed purposefully moving forward with St. George's in collaborative ministry. They have determined a heading. However, we haven't left port yet and we aren't going to until, as many details as possible are known. We need to be sure that whatever direction we chose, we are addressing the issues we are trying to resolve. The Vestry is fully aware that our aging membership, our declining energy, and rising expenses drive exploring a partnership with St. George's. Yet, if these are the only reasons we collaborate with St. George's, then we are not likely to survive let alone thrive. The Vestry is very clear that our mission as part of the body of Christ must be articulated and embraced. We must have a strategic plan for living into that ministry or ministries. Corporately the

Vestry is willing to answer Hannah's summons to offer all we are and all we have to God. It makes my heart so glad and I feel so privileged to be with you on this voyage. The rest is up to God for God is in control.

AMEN.