

PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

WHAT GOOD NEWS – WHAT BAD NEWS

MARK 13: 1 – 8 November 15, 2009

Pilgrim Bud Precise

One of the books I read to Leigh and David when they were preschool age is titled “What Good Luck! What Bad Luck.” David in particular liked it because it was about a boy. The boy’s name was Ned. (I will actually ask the children to come to the front and read the book with them.)

“What Good Luck, Ned got a letter that said, Please come to a surprise party.

What bad luck! The party was in Florida and he was in New York.

What good luck! A friend lent him an airplane.

What bad luck! The motor exploded.

What good Luck! There was a parachute in the airplane.

What bad luck! There was a hole in the parachute.

What Good luck! There was a haystack on the ground.

What bad luck! There was a pitchfork in the haystack.

What good luck! He missed the pitchfork!

What bad luck! He missed the haystack.

What good luck. He landed in water.

What bad luck! There were sharks in the water.

What good luck! He could swim.

What bad luck! There were tigers on the land.

What good luck! He could run.

What bad luck! He ran into a deep dark cave.

What good luck. He could dig.

What bad luck! He dug himself into a fancy ballroom.

What Good luck! There was a surprise party going on.

What Good Luck! The party was for him because

What Good luck! It was his birthday.

I am not suggesting that life is filled with that much adventure. Nevertheless, our text today in the 13th chapter of Mark is a lot like a “What good news! What bad News! Story. Jesus is coming out of the temple. One of his disciples comments on the magnificent building and the large stones. Jesus answers that this massive, important building will be destroyed. I am not sure of the response of the disciple, but I can imagine it would be a lot like our response if someone has told us the Twin Towers in New York would come down in a matter of minutes. Buildings like that are not supposed to crumble. In addition, oceans are not supposed to leap out of their seabed’s and flood

miles inland. The ground is not supposed to shake and undulate. The sky is not supposed to form a funnel cloud and destroy a town. Yet we watched the Twin towers collapse, we witnessed on TV a tsunami flood a nation. I was in park housing at Acadia when an earthquake caused me to think an airplane had hit our building. Many of us can personally testify to the power of a tornado. These events are more than a great loss and suffering to those present. There is something more deep and abiding about the sense of loss. We know that something we once believed in – a tower that would stand forever, an ocean that would stay securely in its seabed – that assurance in our lives is not longer trustworthy. We have lost a foundation on which we once built our lives.

As Jesus and his disciples are leaving the temple, the disciples remark about the large stones. Jesus startles them with his prediction that the temple will be destroyed. This chapter is apocalyptic in nature. It is talk about the end of time. Jesus tells his disciples that this temple – this very center of the nation will be destroyed. Yes – this very temple they are looking at and admiring. The Jews had lost almost everything to the Roman occupation. However, they still had the temple. The temple looked big, heavy, eternal. We still do that with our religious buildings. Most churches are built to look older than they really are. We even bold down the pews. I do not know why we do this. Maybe the reason is that much of our life is unsubstantial – it is fluid. Much of life is disrupted, confused, dislodged. It is nice to know the church is solid. Dependable. Big stones. The disciples had the feeling of security – this temple will be here forever. What bad news. Jesus tells his disciples the shocking news that the beloved temple will be destroyed. Amid wars and rumors of wars, nations rising against nation – there will be great destruction. That is bad news to the disciples.

And yet, Jesus ends today's Gospel lesson saying these events will be "birth." The bad news of destruction is good news of the birth of a new day. We use the word – apocalyptic – to speak of the end of time. But actually the word does not mean destruction, ending. Apocalyptic means "unveiling," – it means, "revealing."

So is the text today about cataclysmic destruction – OR - is this text really about a birth – the beginning of something new? God is a god of creation, but many times the new comes from a dismantling – it is a recreation. Just this week we remembered the tearing down of the Berlin wall. It these new worlds order that has emerged in the post-cold war era God's goal for humankind. Maybe we have a ways to go yet. I remember the cry that rose up in the aftermath of the horrid attacks of 9/11, the cry that continues to drive a lot of our energy and resources. It calls us to rid the world of terrorist regardless of the cost. Yet as we work to save the world from terrorist, the great deep chasms between the rich and poor are more evident. It is God's goal for us to end terrorism, or is there more work to be done on basic human rights?

It those issues seem far away to most of us today, think about churches struggling over the place of gay and lesbian persons in their midst. There are groups who want to "purify" the church. Yet if they were to reach their goal, would God's goal for the Body of Christ" be met? How can we be the body of Christ and try to separate anyone from God's love and acceptance of them as children?

We believe that God is still creating. "God is still speaking" is one of the sayings of our United Church of Christ. That is one reason we include a contemporary reading

every Sunday in the scripture lessons for the day. We, Pilgrim Church, are a people that have experienced the putting down of the old and the birth of the new. Was the temple more beloved to the Jews than our Blue Roof building? Certainly temple affected more people, it was much bigger, but we cannot say our leaving Montclair Road was not painful. Leaving the old is difficult, whether we are forced to find a new way or we leave it for what we understand to be a way to the future. We are excited about a new space. We are excited about a full time minister. We are excited about our future as a Community of Faith. Bad news – Good news.

Natalie Sleeth wrote a hymn for her husband who was in the hospital, dying of cancer. It is a powerful witness that in the midst of changing times, God is present with us and will lead us into the future- even when that future is uncertain and frightening. The final verse of the hymn reads

In our end is our beginning, in our time infinity;
In our doubt there is believing, in our life eternity.
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.