

Well, once again I want to greet you once again and welcome you to this unique and important time of worship, not only in the life of our community, but in the life of our world. I want to say to us, right now, as we're once again gathering digitally, recognizing the challenge it is of choosing to maintain social distances through this time of pandemic, attending to God's Word is the very most important thing we can do together. As we've watched this week and last, no doubt in shocked disbelief and deep grief, attending to God's Word together is the very most important thing we can do together. And as we see our nation seek to navigate the most difficult social challenges in a generation, with that has become a haunting and all too familiar refrain, attending to God's Word is the very most important thing we can do together.

Before we begin, I need to admit to you how much I have struggled with and agonized over what to say to us in this time.

1. What is it that we are seeing? Where is the truth and authentic reality present in what we're seeing?
2. What's really going on? When facts are disputable, and reality appears to be subject to opinion, what's really going on?
3. Most importantly, what is Jesus saying in the midst of this moment in time in which we are living? I am going to invite you to look with me at the biblical narrative, to God's revealed Word in Jesus Christ, because he does make claims to reality, authority, truth, and allegiance over our lives. And he invites us to bend our wills and our worldviews to his, and not the other way around.
4. Lastly, what does this mean for us, for our community, for our congregation? And what are we to do?

So as we begin, before I read from Scripture I want to invite you join in praying with me and for me as we open God's Word. We come to you today Lord, to place our lives before your open Word. Speak to us with your voice, the voice that soars high above the noise, and the voice that meets us in our confusion and grief, the voice that with surgical precision removes our hearts of stone and gives us hearts of flesh that beat in rhythm with yours. Speak Lord, we are listening.

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"² Then 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, ⁴"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"⁵ Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!'^[a] 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.

"As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. ¹⁰And the good news^[b] must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹²Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and

have them put to death;¹³ and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.³³ Beware, keep alert,³⁴ for you do not know when the time will come.³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.³⁵ Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Keep awake. As images, events, and messages fill our minds and our screens, commanding our attention. And the temptation we all face is to turn away. We we're tempted discredit, diagnose, or worse, deny the experience of God's image bearing people. We are tempted to turn away from the expressions of heartbreak over another black body cut down, because we've seen so many before. We're tempted to make excuse or explain away and the outrage over a system that disproportionately targets black men and women. We're tempted to grieve the destruction of property and place more than human lives and communities. We're tempted to turn away. But Jesus is saying to us take it all in, keep awake.

In our passage this morning Jesus and a few of his disciples have left Jerusalem and have gone up on the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley and they are looking out over their beloved city, the City of David, Mt. Zion, God's chosen and beloved city. And as they're talking the unnamed disciple goes fishing for a response. Isn't it wonderful? Look what wonderful stones, what wonderful buildings. He's looking for an endorsement and affirmation. Jesus isn't this thing that we've created wonderful, look at its history, look at its engineering, look what we've done for God.

Under Herod's rule Solomon's Temple was actually enlarged to cover 35 acres (the size of more than 12 football fields) stretching over a mile in circumference. These disciples were marveling at the feats of their ingenuity, their prosperity, their collective achievements...for God.

And Jesus turns and asks them: do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down.

Wait a second Jesus, where is this coming from, just 2 chapters ago you were riding into town with palm branches and Hosannas, why the about face?

Chapters 11-13 are the longest prolonged section of Jesus' teaching of Mark's gospel. Jesus' harsh words of judgment are a direct indictment of Jerusalem and the perversion of justice taking place within its walls and the idolatry taking place in the courts of its temple. No sooner than he enters Jerusalem, Jesus witnesses the desecration and injustice taking place, and in an act of righteous indignation and uncharacteristic violence Jesus turns over the tables of the money changers. In other words, Jesus levels the livelihood of those profiting while injustice was taking place around them.

They are the fig tree which is bearing no fruit whom Jesus curses as he walks past.

When God's city and the temple are being used to exclude, trample, ignore the purpose for which it was created Jesus warns that even it would one day fall. Jesus issues the firm warning that, these stones, magnificent as they are, filled with history and tradition, would soon become a pile of rubble. In fact, that's exactly what happened 40 years later as Rome swept through Palestine and decimated Jerusalem in 70AD.

You see God's vision for his Kingdom is so intimately bound to the peace and the flourishing of all of his people that there is no length too great, not structure or tradition too sacred, that God will not lay it bare to bring about his righteousness and justice.

New Testament Commentator James Edwards asks the probing question: How much of our nationalism, culture, and civilization itself could (or should) withstand the judgment of God? Like a system of cells that has become malignant, the temple had forsaken its intended purpose and must be eradicated. When the cries of God's people go unheard and unheeded, and injustice festers sooner or later the lion of Judah will roar.

The Prophet Amos says: **for three transgressions of Israel and for four, I will not revoke my punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals—those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted.** God values human life, community, equity, and peace far more than buildings, structures, traditions. And if our outrage right now is for the chaos and destruction taking place at the hands of the looters and rioters, well then we need to hear once again God's voice in the prophet. What will it take for God's people to listen? Even the stones will not be left on top of one another. Don't turn away. Stay awake Church.

In the midst of moments like this in our society in which so many voices are vying for our attention, speaking to us and even shouting at us, I want to acknowledge the challenge of discerning the true voice of God in it all. I believe that what God is inviting us into, and what we are going to take away from this time we're in, is our ability to listen and our capacity to understand and hear.

The disciples faced this same dilemma in the voices asking for their allegiance. **⁴“Tell 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!’^[a] and they will lead many astray.**

This chapter in Mark's Gospel shows similarities to the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation. These three other books are a genre of Scripture called Apocalyptic Literature. Apocalyptic literature deals with eschatology, which is just a fancy theological word for last things. Eugene Peterson writes that Eschatology is the most pastoral of all theological perspectives, showing us how the ending impinges on the present in such a way that the truth of the gospel becomes real for us in the middle. Eschatology and Apocalyptic is not about predicting the times and the seasons, or even what it will be like when we fly away to glory. What Jesus is doing here with the disciples is painting them a picture of the things that will happen at God's hand as we continue to ignore and pervert God's righteousness and justice. Jesus is showing the lengths to which God will go to bring about his reign.

And we learn how to discern and understand our present in light of God's future inbreaking kingdom by learning to discern and understand the person and mission of God's incarnate son, Jesus Christ.

In his little book *Dogmatics in Outline*, Karl Barth says:

“God's revelation in the man Christ Jesus is compelling and exclusive and God's work in Him is helpful and adequate, because this man is not a being different from God, but the only Son of the Father; that is God Himself uniquely living through and of Himself; He is God's omnipotence, grace and truth in person and therefore the authentic mediator between God and all other men.”

Jesus Christ is the one voice of God speaking to us in, over, and above all the noise. And his word to us for how we will engage and respond is “Be on your guard.” The Apostle Paul will later say in Romans 13:11: “you know the time, the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand.”

Now is a time when we need to be very clear and confident that the voice we are listening to is indeed the voice of Jesus Christ.

In 1934 Karl Barth was called Berlin where he was the “undesirable guest” of a gathering of German Christian Church. You see, in an attempt to consolidate power to the Third Reich Hitler needed the involvement of the church in his cause, and he was able to garner that support among leaders of the German Christian Church. Preparations were being made for Hitler's reception of a number of representatives of churches into the Third Reich. When he arrived, Barth was asked to agree to a statement that he could only see as heretical, that there were other forms of revelation by which we understand God—a subtle statement that could open the door to shared allegiance in the church. Barth responded by saying: we have different beliefs, different spirits, and a different God, as long as representatives of the German Church continue to drown out the voice of Christ by the voice of a stranger. It is not a matter of persons, it is a matter of fact. The German Christian Cause is rotten to the core.

Soon after that, Barth, along with members of the Reformed and Lutheran Confessing Churches gathered in the town of Barmen to come up with a Theological Declaration. Seeing the rise of a growing nationalism based on an ideology of blood and soil, and how some in the church had succumbed to the temptation to use Jesus Christ to justify the world as it was, leaders in Barmen sought to clarify and understand the true and authentic Word of God—not necessarily to mount an attack on Hitler or Nazism. They invited the Church listen for the *one true* voice speaking above the rest through the pages of Holy Scripture.

Barmen declared that Jesus Christ, as he is witnessed to us in holy scripture, the one Word of God whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death. It rejected as false teaching the doctrine that there could be a different source of church proclamation from this one Word of God and to recognize the truth and to repudiate the error was “the indispensable theological foundation of the German Evangelical Church.”

Jesus Christ is God's one Word to us, from whom we receive our life, our liberty, our mission, and our calling. And he does not share allegiances. It is Jesus Christ who came in the power and the anointing of the Holy Spirit to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovering of

sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed, and the year of the Lord's favor. This was not just a liberty and freedom from the spiritual bondage of sin that enslaves us all, this is, I believe the one true Word in Jesus Christ also proclaims and commands freedom from structural systems that are knowingly or unknowingly engineered to keep God's people in bondage.

Church we are being invited in this moment, as God's people here in Wabash Indiana to consider the gravity and authority of this Word of God. Will we succumb, as so many in our nation choose to cover their ears? Will we be tempted to discredit, explain away, or just shrug our shoulders in resignation while the cries of our brothers and sisters continue to rise? Sooner or later the Lion of Judah will roar, are we awake? Are we listening?

Pharaoh ignored the Moses and the Hebrews and felt the wrath of God's judgment in the form of plagues. Plagues that decimated Egyptian livestock, crops, their economy, and even their very nation and its sons. All this because of God's bitter distaste for his actions? Judgment is what happens when we time and again turn a blind eye and deaf ear to God's call for justice and righteousness.

Jesus issues warnings in the form of wars, natural disasters, and catastrophe. Will we hear, are we listening? **“Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’^[a] and they will lead many astray. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸ 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.**

The purpose of this litany of woes is not to lure us into making speculations about the end times. Rather Jesus gives this warning as a way to anchor us in faithfulness and vigilance in the present. The doom and gloom of this list only serve to highlight the seriousness of God's concern for the justice of his people. The time is now, don't turn away. Stay awake!

Throughout the witness of scripture God has always stood definitively with and for the marginalized and persecuted. Jesus chose the path of humility service and suffering and not military conquest and he promises that as we choose to be on the side of the weak and vulnerable God will empower and embolden our witness. It is not an easy journey, like habits, old allegiances die hard. And we may even face resistance, but Jesus also tells us that suffering and persecution for the sake of the name are not a sign of the end, but rather an authenticator of the genuine gospel being lived and proclaimed.

So let these words give us our true north in times of chaos and confusion

-Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than this.

-What does the Lord require? Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.

-And finally another image, this one of a new Jerusalem, not one in ruins, but one remade

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”