

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
November 18, 2018

Text: Mark 13:1-13

Theme: “Stone Struck”

We live in striking days. We are constantly connected. Often this is good. We can easily schedule meeting places, keep in touch with children and grand children, and parents. Information is readily and literally right at our fingertips. But it can be not so good. Seeing what our friend is having for dinner in Hawaii may distract us from the person sitting right across the table from us.

Yes, these are striking times. It is a world of unparalleled creature comforts. We are more than a little spoiled. We have multiple autos, multiple TVs, multiple bathrooms and multiple sinks in those bathrooms. If you don't have multiples then you are roughing it. Can you really have too many flush toilets? The shiny appeals to us. What are we to do with something like this (rough chunk of limestone)?

We may well be struck by the new, the ornate, the intricate. This could be to the detriment of the lasting God has put before us, what He has put before us to save us and sustain us and what He has put before us to do as He equips us. We may well be stone struck. What's that?

That is what was happening to the apostles in our text. The context is the same as last week and the week before. Jesus and His apostles are in the temple area in Jerusalem. The Jewish leadership had been striking at Jesus attempting to entrap Him. We may well say they had struck out as three attempts in succession failed. Now Jesus and crew are leaving the temple area and are probably looking back. And this is when the apostles are stone struck, struck by the stones of the temple and the buildings. “Teacher, what

wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings.” (vs 1) Wonderful” is from the wonder of the translator. A simpler translation would be “what sort of,” or “what manner of” as when Gabriel spoke to Mary, she tried to determine “what sort of greeting this may be.” (Luke 1:29-- **potapo, j**, potapos). Josephus tells us some of the stones were white, some 37 feet long, some 12 feet high, and some 18 feet wide (CSSB note on Mark 13:1). No doubt it was a sight to behold. That certainly would have been true for those Galileans, and it would have been true for us Jonesborians if we had been there.

This great temple was largely the work of Herod the Great. Some work on the temple complex still continued even though Herod had been dead for about 30 years. This temple was Herod’s rebuild of the rebuilt, that rebuilt after the Jews returned from exile. The temple would have been standing for about 450 years at this time. The Jews didn’t care much for Herod, but certainly cared for his work, after all, this was the LORD’s temple. It was the place God to approach His people and for them to approach Him within limits

Yes, the apostles were stone struck by the wonder of the Temple. They were also struck by their own sacred stones, shiny things that appealed to them such as being at Jesus’ right or left, or at least close by when He would come into His kingdom. Maybe it was about to happen. They longed to be a position where others could be struck by their awesomeness. Was their time to shine almost at hand.

What stones are calling out their wonder to us? We look about and we see lots of stuff, stuff to be had. Why not me? We may look back. We have left the life of sin, died to it. But it still calls; can have quite a draw. On the other hand we may be looking forward to our Lord’s kingdom. We are in the kingdom now through faith in Him, but still that old nature reaches out it’s tentacles. We are satisfied with a safe spot for me, maybe

my family. It adds some security, gets me over the rocky spots, but others—not my problem? Maybe others can even be struck by my awesomeness. It is very easy to be struck by the shininess of me.. Yes, the shiny. Again, can we ever have too many flush toilets?

Jesus had something to say to those stone struck viewers. Those gaze drawing stones were going to be struck. Those amazing, magnificent stones will be toppled and become scattered rubble. The hammer of Rome would come down in 70 AD. We could say it was right on schedule. Would it demonstrate the futility of opposing Rome? Would it be God's judgment? Yes, though it would only be futile to oppose Rome as this was part of God's hand in working through those who don't even acknowledge Him. Yes, God's judgement, the destruction of what once the place where He had caused His name to dwell, but the place that had lost its former place. Why, because of the Stone the builders had rejected.

God saw all this coming. God guided the working of it all together to bring about eternal blessing. Jesus was the rejected stone. Isaiah had prophesied, "He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, no beauty that we should desire Him." (Isaiah 53:2) He was not shiny enough. He did not fit the plans of the rulers, a real misfit, no place for Him in the magnificent temples of their lives, actually, He stuck out like a sore thumb. So He was struck in their builder's envy, and evil and fear. They would bring their problems to an end by bringing him to his end.

The keepers and admirers of the temple would strike the Temple. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again." (John 2:20). No more sacrifice would be needed at the temple because of the sacrifice of The Temple.

There was some hammering to be done. The slow to believe disciples would be hammered by the reality of the falsity of their dreams. Their reign of glory would not be

Jesus in the glories of the Jerusalem before them. Their dream would be handed over, condemned and crucified, even dead and buried. They would ask, “what now?; is there anything left?” as they looked over the rubble landscape of their lives. There is always some hammering to be done in lives of back glancing attracted by the shiny groupies like you and me. It is easy to get caught up, entangled in what does not last, holding the momentary as eternal and the eternal as fleeting. The law hits home, hammers us with the reality of our sin. Refusing to look in the mirror of the law will not make the soil of sin disappear.

There will be temple destruction, but there will be Temple reconstruction, actually resurrection. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it.” Jesus had been struck by the envy and fear of man, but even more He had been struck by the hammer of the justice and judgment of God for sin, not His, but ours. He was raised again on the third day, just as He had said. Now we have entrance to God’s temple, not the one made by hands, but God’s heavenly sanctuary. “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way He opened to us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh.” (Hebrews 10:19, 20) Judgment for sin has been satisfied and the bonds of death broken by His resurrection.

The news has gone out; the Gospel is being proclaimed to all nations. The foundational work happens through the apostles. Jesus had laid out their life story. They would be tried, would be jailed and beaten, and even killed. They would stand before governors and kings for His sake. All the time they would remain faithful in telling His story, the good news of salvation, the certainty of the sure foundation for all eternity and for right now.

The news is for us. We stand fast on the steadfast One. We do stir one another to on, not in envy for more shiny things. There is always the more shiny out there. This is not a vendetta against shiny toilet paper holders, certainly not against flush toilets. But the shiny goods are not gods that can deliver. I suppose the toilet paper holder could be a metaphor for their ultimate value. No, we stir one another to love and good works. It is from God's love to us. In Christ there is salvation. We are new creations, God's creations, His workmanship for the good works that He has prepared beforehand for us to do. He give us the resources, shiny things included, to get that work done. We draw near to God in confidence knowing that He is the One who stirs by the Spirit.

Our epistle tells us we do not neglect to meet together, meaning we do meet, as right now. As we are here we are stone struck, struck by the tablets of the law that awakens us to allure of the shiny things of this age, and struck by the Gospel to see the Rock of Ages.

The day is drawing near of our Lord's return. As we near the end of the church year we are reminded of such. We have been the message that saves, the message that changes us to serve that more may know that salvation. For Jesus' sake. Amen