

As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

Jesus and his disciples have been in the temple in Jerusalem. It is probably the first time many of his disciples have been at the temple. They are amazed at the size of the complex and the grandeur of the structure. The temple represents the center of their religious life. Its grandeur symbolizes the greatness of first century Judaism. And Jesus' reaction to the grandeur of the temple is that it will all be thrown down. Not one stone will be left upon another. The disciples need to focus on where their faith and security truly lie, not in the buildings and institutions, but in God.

Many years ago, before I became Episcopalian, my husband and I were members of another Protestant denomination. We attended a church where John D. Rockefeller had been a founding member and was instrumental in the design of the church buildings. Needless to say, the gothic stone structure was quite impressive. Many people driving by thought it was a Roman Catholic monastery. By the time we joined the church, the congregation had dwindled in size and the facilities had maintenance issues that required large sums of capital expenditures, which the congregation did not have at the time. The Executive Committee of the church decided to lay off the assistant pastor and use that money to build a new sign in front of the church because, "the façade will bring people in." As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" This church had placed its security and identification in its buildings, not in Jesus Christ. "The façade will bring people in." My husband and myself left that church and became Episcopalians shortly after this comment was made. And no the façade did not bring people in.

Jesus was more concerned about justice and the in breaking of God's Kingdom than in the majesty of the temple. He had entered Jerusalem to the acclaim of the crowds, overturned the moneychangers' tables and argued with the chief priests, the scribes and the elders about issues regarding his authority. He has told them that the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your being and to love your neighbor as yourself. He has commended the widow's faith in God as she contributed all she had to the temple funds. Jesus continually stresses to trust in God.

Hannah the mother of Samuel trusted in God. She goes to pray and asks God to give her a son, to deliver her from her torment. She endures derision by members of her family and is rebuked by the priest while she is praying, but she continues to trust in God. Finally, she conceives and bears a son, Samuel. The song of Hannah, which we just said this morning, reflects her joy. *"My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God." "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap."*

Another woman has a similar song as she conceives a son. *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. . . . He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the*

*lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.*

The writer of the **Gospel according to Luke** probably drew on Hannah's Song for Mary's Magnificat. Both Hannah and Mary trusted in God. Hannah was an older barren woman, the property of her husband, someone without status in her community. Mary was a young woman, engaged to be married, but again someone of low status in her society. To all appearances neither of these women were important. They were the poor and the lowly and God looked with favor on the lowliness of his servants. Both of them raised sons who showed God's love to their world. Both women give us examples of trusting in God.

I traveled to El Salvador several years ago for the Diocese of Ohio with one other person who thankfully spoke Spanish. We traveled around the country with an Episcopal priest who had several small parishes. One parish was Holy Trinity which was located in a government built town. The town was comprised of women and children because the men had been killed in the civil war. Since it was government housing no churches were allowed in the town. So I was wondering how we were going to have church on Sunday afternoon as we traveled to the town. As we arrived, women and children emerged from various houses bringing benches, a table, candles, a cross, and bread and wine, which they arranged in a semi-circle in the dusty courtyard amid the buildings. The priest began the Eucharist as motorcycles roared around the town behind us and the wind swirled the dust at our feet. After the service we ate with the women and as we talked, I learned that almost all the women had been raped during the war and their husbands had been killed. Yet they continued to trust that God would provide for them and give them a means to raise their children in peace. They had no grand building, but they were the church. God had raised up the poor from the dust; he had lifted the needy from the ash heap. Out of their poverty they had put in everything they had, all they had to live on. They trusted in God to provide for them.

When we worry about the church's future, maybe we should look to Hannah and Mary and the women of El Salvador. They trusted in God to be with them in times of trouble. Jesus tells his disciples that there will be *wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 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.*"

Following Jesus will not be easy. Christ the King is going through a time of new birth accompanied by birth pangs as we transition out of the pandemic. The old ways of being church are no longer working. People no longer go to a church just because they live in a certain neighborhood. In the area right around our church, 63% of the people have no interest in being involved with a religious organization of any kind. Many young adults consider themselves spiritual but not religious. The usual ways of being church in our society are failing to address the needs of those searching for God. We, as Christ's Church are looking at how to proclaim God's love in our present time and place as the Innovation Team meets today. All of our churches are having birth pangs as we deal with hybrid worship services and zoom classes. There will be pain, but also joy, as we trust in God to lead us through this time of new birth.

In the midst of new birth, we celebrate and thank the Lord for how God has provided for us here at Christ the King during this past year. On Dec 5<sup>th</sup> we will present our financial commitment to the church for 2022 out of the abundance that God has given us. May we give to God out of the same faith and trust as Hannah, Mary and the women of El Salvador so that we can join with them in proclaiming, *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!*