**Sermon The 25th Sunday after Pentecost.**

**1 Samuel 1:4-20, Song of Hannah, (APBA p. 429), Hebrews 10:11-14 (15-18) 19-25, Mark 13:1-11**

Do you remember how our liturgical year began on December 2019. Can we remember what it even looked like, it seems like a different time altogether, another reality. As we have walked through the Gospel of Mark there have been questions, ponderings, and learning about the kingdom of God.

As we lead toward the end of the liturgical year, this final Sunday, before we celebrate Christ the King, what is it that you and I will take away from this year? We had thought that 2021 was going to be easier but that is not what we discovered. Lockdown after lockdown prevented us from seeing loved ones, from holding those we love close to us. Even now, we are still not at that point when a handshake can be offered freely. What are our hopes and dreams for the new Church year?

In our gospel reading today one of Jesus’ disciples wondered at the marvel of the Temple mount by saying, ‘What large stones, and what large buildings!’ Jesus then foretells the destruction of the temple saying, ‘not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down’.

The disciples ask Jesus privately about when this was to happen. I am struck by Jesus reply. Instead of directly answering their question, he says to them, ‘Beware that no one lead you astray’. This is as apt today as it was when Jesus was speaking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives. Our world is full of distractions, that would try to pull us away from our purpose. Away from growing the Kingdom of God. There are a great many things I can think of that try to catch my attention. Some of these things in and of themselves are not necessarily terrible but all the same, they can act as distractions. Some are even worthy of our time to rejuvenate and relax. Nonetheless they can draw my attention away from the Kingdom of God if I am not careful. For example, I enjoy watching TV but it can easily become a time waster. I am sure you can think of other things that distract us from growing the Kingdom of God. Being busy, by not being attentive to prayer, praying for one another,

Jesus described to the disciples what they were to look for. There would be others who would come in Jesus’ name, declaring to be Jesus and they will lead others astray. In our lives there are so many voices to listen to, TV, radio, billboards, Facebook, twitter, on and on it goes. I would even suggest those around us can sometimes become a distraction. Are we encouraging one another in our faith? Building one another up? As we near the end of the Church Calendar, this might be a good time to reflect on this past year. Who has spoken words of encouragement to you, words of life and love and peace. Where do these voices come from? From where do we draw our strength and support in time of trouble? Jesus went on to tell the disciples of the kinds of trials they would face. And indeed many of them were handed over to be imprisoned or killed for their faith. I am encouraged that in this land, we live in freedom. Yes we have had lockdowns that have protected our well-being, yet we are free. We are free to come to church, to worship God in this place. Free to pray, to give of ourselves to God. It matters then how we as Christians show our love for those in the world. It matters what we listen to, take into our hearts and minds.

Jesus told the disciples they would be hated because of their relationship to Jesus. I’m not sure about you, there have been very few moments in my life where I have been condemned because I am a Christian. Unfortunately, it is often those closest to us that can do the most harm. But again, I have never been in fear of my life because of my faith. I hope I never will.

So what does this all mean for us today? Particularly as we remember those who have died so that we can be free. What does it mean to live in such a way that brings glory to God. The apostle Paul writes in the letter to the Hebrews, ‘since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. … consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, … encouraging one another’ (Heb 10: 19-25). The apostle Paul draws us into our Gospel reading in the very next phrase, ‘all the more as you see the Day approaching’. The disciples of Jesus and Paul all expected that Jesus would return soon. Their words were to inspire people to live for God in a manner worthy of our calling.

In our Creed we recite the words right at the end, ‘we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come’ (APBA, p. 123). Indeed that is our hope, the hope of eternal life. If eternity matters to you and I now, then how does my life, your life reflect that?

As we remember the fallen today, as we remember the sacrifices made for our freedom, as we remember the great sacrifice Jesus made for us. Redeeming us, providing grace and forgiveness, let us call to mind what this year has taught us, and consider what God is saying to us about the coming year ahead. And as we come to the Annual Meeting, pray for our Wardens, our Parish Council, for our incumbency committee, for all who give their time as volunteers. And finally as we come to the end of the church year, to celebrate Christ the King, I invite you to consider what it is God has done for us this past year.