

## JESUS UNFAZED

A Sermon for the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Year B, 2009

Text: Mark 13:1-8

*My heart is glad and my spirit rejoices; my body shall rest in hope. (Ps. 16:9)*

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Chill.

(I am fighting the temptation to earn a place in the Guinness Book of World Records by giving the shortest sermon in the world: "Chill.")

But that is about what Jesus is saying in today's gospel. It's a message for his disciples, a message for us: chill.

Jesus sensed tension in his disciples' voices as they remarked the immensity of their surroundings. They were intimidated.

No wonder. They were Galileans. Fishermen. Simple folk from small villages and towns. Jesus had looked a lot bigger against a Galilean backdrop. Here, in Jerusalem, a great city for its time, with some huge buildings including a temple that stood much higher than the buildings around it, Jesus didn't look so almighty. They were cowed.

"What large buildings! What large stones!"

Indeed.

But Jesus was not fazed. He was a small town boy himself, but he was not intimidated by the metropolitan surroundings. "You see these stones? They will all come down. . . . All kinds of things will happen, which will impress you and make you afraid. But *don't be alarmed.*"

Paul tells us in Romans that we ought to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. This comes from Jesus, who complained about people who are not sympathetic with others: "We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."

So, we should be happy with others who are happy, and sad with others who are sad. Fine.

**But he does not say** we should be afraid with those who are afraid. Instead, we are told not to be afraid—even of very fearful things like wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famine . . . We are to be full of courage. Even peace. God has our back. We can keep working. Steady as she goes.

“My heart is glad and my spirit rejoices; my body shall rest in hope.” Because “God is my refuge.”

An image that comes to my mind is a scene common to many Western movies. The town is being ruined by the bad guys. Nobody is safe any more. The people need to be rescued. A savior rides into town, with a few sidekicks. He ties his horse up at the local saloon. Walks in, goes to the bar, his back to the room full of bad guys, and orders a drink.

The camera angle makes us afraid for him. What if one of the bad guys takes this opportunity to jump him? They know who he is. They know what he has come for.

But although we are anxiously holding our breath, we are proud of our hero. Proud of his ability to ignore imminent danger. We admire his insouciance. The way he responds to a threat—on his own terms, in his time. Wow. What a hero. And of course we know he will succeed in his mission. Eventually, he will get rid of the rascals and the town will be at peace once more.

That could be Jesus entering Jerusalem. With one very big exception. He has not come to kill anyone. He has come to die for all of them. He has come to take away the sin, not by killing the worst sinners but by taking their sins with him on the cross. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Jesus will even the score, not by taking out the bad guys, but by paying for what they have done wrong.

Yes, he wants peace for the city. But peace does not come by playing whack-a-mole with sinners. Peace will come when the people of the city are restored to God. When every citizen thinks like Psalm 16:

I have set the LORD always before me;  
because God is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.  
My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices;  
my body also shall rest in hope.  
For you will not abandon me to the grave,  
nor let your holy one see the pit.  
You will show me the path of life;

in your presence there is fullness of joy,  
and in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

The calm inside Jesus as he arrived in the city that would be the death of him was not a peace that he had worked up by practicing it a lot in the desert. It was peace that came from being one with God. He knew that the Father was in him, and he was in the Father, that there wasn't any question about God's love for him or about God's will for him. He knew that, even if the large stones of Jerusalem fell down and crushed him, he would be delivered. He could pray "Your will, not mine," even when the way forward looked totally bad.

So, Jesus was unfazed. So what? What does that mean for *me*? On the Minnesota Multi-phasic Personality Index's "harm avoidance" scale, my score is about that of a Rock Cornish game hen.

The Good News we preach is not that you and I must *imitate* Jesus, or be as good as him. If that were the message, it would not be a message I personally could handle. The message is not that we must imitate Jesus, be just as heroically brave as he is, in order to please God.

The Good News is that he offers as a gift the same relationship with God that he has. Jesus promises that God will have *our* back the same way God had *his* back, that week in Jerusalem. The Good News tells us not just that God is a mighty fortress, but that we are inside that fortress, not outside begging to get in.

The Gospel does not tell us to act like we think we'll be all right. It invites us to believe that God has told us himself, through Jesus Christ, that we will be all right in the end. That when Michael appears, as Daniel puts it, we shall be delivered. Or, as Psalm 16 says, that "because God is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken." As Hebrews 10 expresses it, that "he who has promised is faithful."

Do not be alarmed, Jesus told them, and tells us. It's a different word from "do not be afraid," which he also used to say regularly. It means something like "do not be troubled," or "do not be disturbed." It doesn't mean so much "don't be startled" as "don't carry your trouble around in your hearts." Do not be defeated by mere threats.

Christians have a lot of work to do in this world, participating in the care and redemption of all that God has made, bearing the burdens of others, loving all people, even our enemies, forgiving, being patient, speaking the truth in love. We will never get anything done if we stand in awe of what is wrong.

Do not be alarmed. Chill. God is our Lord. Amen.