

Those Who Are Being Sanctified

A Sermon for the 2nd Sunday Before Advent

St. Dunstan's Anglican Church, Largo, FL

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Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-8

The work of Jesus is finished. That's the essential message we get from our readings this morning. In the Gospel of Mark, we hear Jesus predicting the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. In a typical fashion, the disciples put their foot in their mouths. Think about what Jesus has been doing up to this point.

Jesus has finally made it to Jerusalem, he's walked into the Temple and judged it, he's gone back and been challenged by the religious authorities of the city, and now, on his way back out, Mark says, "as he came out of the Temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!' (Mark 13:1)

Jesus says, "The Temple is finished, and God's judgment is going to fall upon," and on the way out the door his disciples are saying, "But look how pretty it is!" These guys just don't get it. Again. So Jesus says it to them plainly. If they had been able to understand the symbolism of the fig tree earlier, they would have already understood, but since they don't, he has to tell them plainly. He said to them, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Mark 13:2).

This statement by Jesus is no insignificant thing. That this moment doesn't play a more substantial role in our thought when we think about Jesus suggests that we still have a lot more to learn about him. In

Jesus' mind, based on the way that he acts and the way that he speaks, there are at least four historical events that for him theologically a singular event.

I want to be clear. It's not that Jesus can't distinguish between these events. He certainly can. Rather it's as though the tendrils of the events are so theologically interconnected and related that it's difficult to separate them, it's difficult to speak about any one of them without at least keeping in mind the other three. Three of them you will immediately recognize and say, "yes, I see how those events are integrally related" and one you'll probably shake your head to and say, "No, I don't exactly see that."

Those four events are his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD. And here's how this works. Jesus, and his disciples after he was gone, made claims about what had happened, and those claims were both historical and theological. Jesus didn't just die; he died for the sins of the world. Jesus didn't just rise from the dead; he rose from the dead in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Jesus didn't just ascend; he ascended to the right hand of God. The disciples could say that they were eyewitnesses of the historical events, but how does one go about proving the theological side of those events? You point to something in the future, something big and dramatic that no one can miss, and you say, "When you see that happen, you'll know that I was right." For Jesus, that event was the destruction of the Temple.

And this connection is not random. Because of what Jesus accomplished when he died, rose, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, the Temple no longer had the function it used to have. Its historical destruction is simply history catching up with theology. And we can see this in our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews this morning, and note that the author says this while the Temple is still standing.

He says, "Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when the Messiah had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat

down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:11-14).

The point the author is making is that when Jesus was done, he sat down. This language doesn’t exactly resonate with us today because so much of our lives involves sitting. Many people today sit in a car to go to work, sit in their office at work, sit in their car to get back home, and then sit at a desk on the computer or sit on a couch in front of the tv or with a book, and then they start the process again tomorrow. But as anyone who works on their feet will tell you, and this was how most people worked in Jesus day, when the work is done, you sit down. Sitting down is a sign of completion, a sign of rest, a sign of finished work.

When Jesus was done, he sat down because his work had been completed once for all, and there was, therefore, no more need for the regular cycles of temple sacrifices that kept the priests so busy all the time. The Temple no longer had a purpose, so you can see how it’s destruction fits in with Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension theologically because the work of the first three necessitates the ending of the other.

Think about that for a moment. The work of Jesus on the cross, the work of our salvation, was so complete, so full, and so final that even the God-ordained sacrificial system of the Old Testament had to go. The point is, quite simply, that there is no more work to be done. Listen to what the author of this letter says again and pay attention to the verb tenses. “For by a single sacrifice, the Messiah has perfected for all time those are being sanctified.” Let me say that again. “For by a single sacrifice, the Messiah has perfected for all time those are being sanctified.”

Do you remember me saying to you that who you are is not who you are but who you are in Christ? Do you remember me saying that you are in the process of becoming who you already are in Jesus? That’s

what this verse is saying. Sometimes events get all messed up when we think theologically, just like an event that happens four decades later can be related to the events of holy week, because God's perspective on time is not the same as ours. But the truth stands nevertheless, even if we have a hard time wrapping our brains around it. The work of Jesus in your life is done. He has perfected you. That's how he sees you. That's how your heavenly Father sees you.

And you might say, "But I can't be perfected. I'm a wreck. I'm a mess. I'm a sinner." Yes, you are. But you are also being sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit, which is the promise of the new covenant, and if you have the Spirit and if you are being sanctified, then you are already perfect in Jesus because his work was done once for all and then he sat down.

You are who you are in Jesus. You are in the process of becoming who you already are in Christ. There's no more work for you to do. There's nothing for you to earn. There are no more sacrifices to be made. There's only one thing to do, and it comes down to one single word: believe. Believe what he says about his death. Believe what he says about his resurrection. Believe what he says about his ascension. "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

Amen.