

## Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March

### **Mark 13:1-13**

As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

"Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you.

Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."

In this 'mini apocalypse', Jesus describes the turbulent events to come, and compares them to labour pains. Part of this will be the destruction of the pride and joy of the Jewish people, the symbol of their religion, and a wonder of the world - the Temple. He reminds us that nothing we build will last, only the eternal values of faith.

The poet Shelley described coming across a huge ruined statue in the desert. The inscription on the plinth are in stark contrast to the ruin it has become over the centuries:

*'On the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'*

The hymn writer Robert Bridges is right in 'All my hope on God is founded':

*Pride of man and earthly glory,  
Sword and crown betray his trust:  
What with care and toil he buildeth,  
Tower and temple fall to dust.  
But God's power, hour by hour,  
Is my temple and my tower.*

Jesus does not promise us protection from the upheaval and persecution to come, but he does promise the presence of the Holy Spirit. And also, in the end, salvation.

The current pandemic is a reminder of just how fragile we really are. Swinburne wrote: '*Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master of things*' - but he was wrong. Even a microscopic thing as a virus can bring down our human-made structures and systems. God alone can save us.

## Prayers

(adapted from *Red Letter Christians*)

Forgive us as we have feared others,

And in doing so we have contaminated our hearts.

Forgive us as we have hoarded our resources,

And in doing so we have abandoned our witness.

Forgive us as we have desired control,

And in doing so we have not loved our neighbour.

Comfort the afflicted among us.

In their loneliness, provide care.

In their sickness, provide health.

In their weariness, provide rest.

Soothe our anxious minds as we read viral headlines.

And protect those who have been victims of fear-mongering  
because of our fear of the unknown.

Protect us from the evil one

Who aims to use each update, not to inform or guide,

But to stoke the flames of chaos and confusion.

We thank you for health care workers

Who care for the sick and tend to bodies and souls

With great compassion and commitment.

Give them stamina. Give them wisdom. Give them grace.

We pray for those who lack access to health care,

Or safe places to rest their heads.

We pray for the vulnerable:

The sick, The disabled, The elderly, The uninsured.

For the Kingdom is theirs.

We pray for the mother who worries about her children and  
the job she can't afford to take time off from.

We pray for the chronically ill fighting invisible battles,

Hour by hour, day by day.

Nourish their bodies; protect their souls.  
For they are never out of your sight.  
We ask for your Holy guidance  
As we journey into the unknown.  
Ignite in us a spirit of generosity;  
Of hope and mercy; Of grace and truth;  
Of gentleness and self-control.  
Cleanse our spirits, Comfort our minds,  
Care for our bodies, And make us new.  
We give thanks that you lavish your grace onto us,  
Not pushing us into shame, but providing a steadfast  
comfort. When all else falls away, we turn to You alone.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus  
Who healed the sick and sat with the poor.

**Amen.**

Christians in Scotland asked to join in prayer with a lit candle today at 7pm, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:  
*We pray in solidarity with those across Britain and Ireland and in solidarity with those across the world who face the challenge that the Covid-19 pandemic brings.*

*We turn to you, our Father, for we need your help.*

*Lord Jesus, as you have promised, be with us, whatever lies ahead, Strengthen us, Holy Spirit, as we face this together.*

*We pray for our world and our country, as coronavirus threatens our lives and our livelihood, leaving many in lockdown, while key workers continue, despite the risk.*

*We pray for government leaders at Westminster and Holyrood, responding to medical and scientific advice, making tough decisions for the wellbeing of all.*

*We pray for all who serve on the frontline in the NHS and in social care; facing increasing numbers, overstretched*

*resources and distressing human need.*

*Bless those who are ill, those who are alone and afraid,  
those exhausted looking after their family, those worried  
for the vulnerable, those fearful for their finances, those  
shut in to their fears.*

*Thank you for those who have returned from retirement to  
help, or joined the volunteer army.*

*Thank you for those working:*

*to manufacture needed resources, to find a vaccine,*

*to keep in contact with the isolated,*

*to encourage others at this time.*

*Have mercy on us, O Lord.*

*Give us faith, hope and love and hear our prayers,*

*in Jesus' name. Amen.*

When this is over,  
may we never again  
take for granted  
A handshake with a stranger  
Full shelves at the store  
Conversations with neighbors  
A crowded theatre  
Friday night out  
The taste of communion  
A routine checkup  
The school rush each morning  
Coffee with a friend  
The stadium roaring  
Each deep breath  
A boring Tuesday  
Life itself.

When this ends,  
may we find  
that we have become  
more like the people  
we wanted to be  
we were called to be  
we hoped to be  
and may we stay  
that way—better  
for each other  
because of the worst.

### **For Children**

Hazel, our young people's worker, has written and recorded a Sunday Club message. It can be found on our Facebook page. (Abbey Church, North Berwick & Dirlerton Kirk)