

Good evening!

I'm Pastor Doug Browne. Thank you for joining me this evening.

May the peace of the Lord be with you.

(pause to let folks say "and also with you.")

Remember, "In life and in death we belong to God."

We trust in God, and God is worthy of our trust. Even when we are practicing social distancing, and trying not to make each other sick.

During this time when we're not meeting in person, I'm going to post videos here, praying with you and walking through the Bible stories in the Gospel of Mark, continuing from where we left off when we were together in one room. I'm doing this on Facebook Live tonight. Then, this Sunday, March 29, we're going to move to Zoom. We will try to post video from that here, too, but there's more information on both the Church website and the Church Facebook page.

If you've missed any of the videos, you can find them and watch them later either here on Facebook or linked from the sermons page on the church website.

My hope is that this will help us remember that we are God's people, no matter what's happening around us, and that God loves us.

Today, let's pick up in Mark chapter 13, verses 1 through 8, if you'd like to read along at home. Jesus is just walking out of the Temple after having taught his disciples many things.

"As he 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.'

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?' Then Jesus began to say to them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. When you hear of 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."

This is the Word of God, for the People of God.

Thanks Be to God.

At first listen, this isn't a very comforting passage of Scripture, is it? Jesus is explaining that all the Temple and all the beautiful buildings around

it are going to be torn down. And they will, in thirty or forty years, when the Romans respond to the First Jewish Revolt by destroying Jerusalem and starting the Diaspora, scattering Jews around the Roman Empire.

He goes on to tell them that all kinds of bad things are going to happen – wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines.

But he tells them not to be alarmed. This is one of the many times when we Christians are told in the Bible not to be afraid.

Right now, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, a lot of people are afraid. Afraid of getting sick, afraid of dying, afraid of losing people we love. That is normal. That is to be expected.

I've talked with some people who are afraid that the world may never go back to normal. It will, depending on what you define as normal.

If you are afraid right now, it's not as simple as just saying, "Don't be scared," is it?

Jesus gives us more than empty platitudes. Jesus tells his followers before he ascends into Heaven, "remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."¹

On Sundays we sing, "Not in the dark of buildings confining, not in some heaven light-years away, [but] here in this place the new light is

¹ Matthew 28:20b.

shining, now is the kingdom and now is the day.”² God is not confined to a building. God’s out here with us.

The Jewish people and the Christian people survived the destruction of the Temple and the Diaspora, the scattering, throughout the Roman world. We will survive having church buildings and other public buildings temporarily closed.

Truly I tell you, The Church isn’t closed. The Church is scattered around Columbus, and around the world. The Church is not the building. The Church is the people. All the people watching this, and lots more besides. The building is a tool we use in ministry. It’s handy, having a place to hold meetings and to worship together, face-to-face.

We will return to the building, I’m sure of it. In the meantime, we are still the church. Jesus still loves us. And Jesus still walks with us, even in the midst of pandemic.

Scripture tells us in the Ninety-First Psalm that, “You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.’

² *Here in this Place*, Glory to God Hymnal #401.

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence;

he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge;

his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling-place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble,

I will rescue them and honor them.

With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.”

To that I can only say, let it be so.

...

And now, people of God, I call you people of God because that's what you are, people of God, remember, we are still the church. We are still God's people. God still loves us, and we still need to remember whose we are.

Trust in God and wash your hands.

And may the grace of God the Father, the love of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit rest upon you and rest in you, now and forever.

Amen.

I hope that I'll see you Sunday morning on Zoom.