

World Communion Sunday - October 6, 2024

1 Samuel 4:19–22; Psalm 74:1–12; Revelation 21:10, 22–27; Mark 13:1–8

“Can communion survive?”

1. The temple in Jerusalem helped people stay connected to God, and helped them feel God was there with them
 - a. By the time of Jesus, the temple had been in Jerusalem as long as anybody had memory.
 - b. This was not the original Temple.
 - i. The original one had been built nearly 1,000 years before Jesus by King Solomon, the son of King David
 - c. But that temple had had been destroyed in the midst of war about 600 years before Jesus when the Babylonians conquered Palestine.
 - i. The disciples would have known the stories, but they sounded so long ago!
 - d. They knew that after the exile to Babylon, the people of God had been allowed to return, and God allowed them to rebuild the temple
 - i. It was not as large as it had once been
 - ii. The second Temple was built perhaps not to the grandeur of the old one, but it was a way of establishing themselves once more in Jerusalem and rededicating themselves to God.
 - iii. That temple actually survived other wars, other occupying powers trying to make it a temple to their gods. But it had survived
 - e. Then, about 20 years before Jesus, a remarkable restoration and expansion of the temple took place.
 - i. This was ordered by King Herod the Great who was the Roman ruler over Palestine, and whose family had converted to Judaism before his birth. As a Roman official in power, it's not clear how much he really took on the Jewish faith and traditions, but without a doubt his effort to expand the temple was a huge deal!
 - ii. That was the Herod in power when Jesus was born.
 - iii. That was the temple that Jesus and the disciples would have known. It was massive and it was Grand.
 - iv. At its heart it still was the place where the Jewish people had the priests offer sacrifices on their behalf, that was the place where worship happened during festivals, that was the center of the sense of identity and spirituality of the people.
 - v. In our passage Jesus and his disciples were at the temple as part of worship.
 1. One of the disciples just couldn't help himself and let out a big sigh of admiration overcome by the Beauty and the sheer size of the temple.
 2. The disciple makes a comment to Jesus about how beautiful and how large this place is.
 3. Now, Jesus in other gospel stories has some harsh words for what the temple had come to mean to the people and how they were even going against the original intent of the temple, for example with the

money changers. But in this moment the teaching that Jesus chooses to give is one of perspective.

4. And Jesus says: the day will come when this will not be here at all.
 5. Difficult times are coming. Rumors of wars and wars are coming.
 6. The days are coming when people will find this destroyed
 7. and the disciples wanted to know when and Jesus doesn't give them a timeline but speaks about deception and fear and rumors and war.
 8. Remember that other temple was destroyed in a war, and so Jesus is basically asking them to be prepared and to ponder what the connection to God really means and he is saying to them it's not Stone and mortar.
- f. What the disciples couldn't have known then was that not forty years after that conversation a Jewish rebellion against Rome would be brutally defeated, and Rome (like Babylon) would destroy the temple. This time, there would be no reconstruction.



- g. If you go to Jerusalem today, the temple mount is still there, a site considered holy by both the Jewish and the Muslim community. It is a site of tension as religion and nationalistic fever try to claim exclusive rights to the site. On that site, today you can see from the Mount of Olives the Dome of the Rock, which was built some 1,300 years ago (that rock is the place where the Jews believe Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac, and also where the Muslims believe Mohammed ascended to heaven). The Western wall, or wailing wall, is the only remaining structure from Herod's temple – and indeed the stones are massive and one can imagine the disciples being impressed by them.

2. The idea of one day no longer having the temple was hard to imagine for the disciples – and it gave them nightmares of what it could mean
 - a. There's a question that the disciples didn't ask. But will we survive? Will the people of God survive?
 - i. I think that's a relevant question for us to ask even if we are not looking at the grandeur of a building, even as we just celebrated our 200th birthday.
 - ii. Yes Jesus, but will we survive? Will the idea of us survive?
 - b. Today is world communion Sunday and throughout the globe believers like you and me are gathering around a table somewhat like this and eating elements somewhat like these and remembering the Savior, remembering Jesus who taught us about God and who brought us close to God.
 - c. But we see in the news about the declining impact and relative lack of importance of churches and even other religious organizations. And we see in the news about wars and genocide and we wonder: and will we survive?
 - d. Maybe we have been impressed in the past by the grandeur of our buildings or our denominations or our traditions. But like with Jesus at the temple, we are reminded that at our core we are a spiritual gathering, a spiritual family, one that can survive and linger well beyond the challenges that might be around us.
 - e. I have had people ask me: Will there be a church, a Presbyterian Church or other denominations in 50 or 100 years?
 - f. I know one thing The church throughout history has survived much harder problems than what we have right now and yet here we are.
 - g. The disciples couldn't imagine their faith without the temple. You and I can't picture what being a follower of Jesus will look like in 100 or 200 years, but what World Communion affirms is that we are a people called and equipped by God, gathered by God here -- across the globe and throughout time.
 - h. On this world communion Sunday we focus on the fellowship of communion linking us to Jesus and those disciples, and to the heavenly banquet we will be invited to one day.
 - i. This table brings sustenance, and reminds us that, like Jesus, we're here risking everything to be in solidarity with one another, with those who suffer injustice, risking everything to proclaim with our desire to follow Jesus.
3. Will this communion survive? The outward form may change or even be crushed, but the inward spirit cannot be destroyed because it is from God – and it will live on to impact people for generation and generation to come, just like it has done from the beginning until today.

Sources: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Temple-of-Jerusalem>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-33-2/commentary-on-mark-131-8-5>

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