

## Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

**Sermon Text:** Mark 13:1-8

**Theme:** *“The enduring church of Jesus”*

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

A new movie is due to hit the movie screens in the coming weeks and it is called, “2012”. This movie once more picks up the topic of the ‘end of the world’. Whilst we might be able to dismiss it as a piece of entertainment, light on reality but heavy with spectacular special effects, it worth considering what lies behind such popularity in such a topic.

Humanity is always looking forward, trying to understand or gain a glimpse into the future. We imagine things will always stay the same, or we are quick to second guess what any particular outcome might be. When the disciples spent time in the temple in Jerusalem, they marvelled at the splendour, the size and the majesty of such a building. Surely if ever there was a building that would endure forever it would be God’s holy house here on earth. Jesus provides a sobering reality check to both his disciples and to us today, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” (Mk 13:2)

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

### Nothing lasts forever

Humanity is living in a time of amazing paradox. In this age of entertainment, we want to be constantly amused. We demand the excitement of new things so we don’t become bored or complacent. This can be seen in how quickly a new tv programme will be axed unless it hits the mark of what people want. And unless the show keeps on reinventing itself, it will be doomed for eventual failure. Music is popular on the radio until it is played to death and we become bored with it. Magazines are so popular because we don’t have time to read books that delve more deeply into their subject material. “Just give me the highlights” seems to be the catchphrase. It amazes me how popular some movies like the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy, but people seem reluctant to read the richness of the original novels.

But just as we crave new and exciting things, we don’t want the things that are familiar to us to stop. There’s an expectation that those things which we like will remain the same so there is an order and a routine to our lives. People complain if the expectations of their job change or if they have to take a detour from their normal route to work or school or any other destination. Trying to change the way our church is set up is always a difficult task because every individual has an expectation as to how they think things should be.

Jesus’ disciples were admiring the temple in Jerusalem. It should be remembered this wasn’t just a church. It was built on the rock upon which Solomon built the original temple, the place which was to be God’s permanent dwelling place on earth. No longer would God dwell in a tent in the midst of his promised land. Only a grand temple would be sufficient. Well that temple was destroyed when the Israelites were exiled but it was rebuilt about 500 years before Christ. This temple was extensively restored by Herod the Great and was completed about 20 years before Christ was born. This means the disciples would have been looking at a temple that would have been about 50 years old, probably in its prime and looking like it would stand forever.

Jesus is very quick to tell his disciples that the buildings don’t really amount to much. For all their magnificence, the time will come when not one stone will stand upon another. What are the buildings that we admire and what do we imagine their future will be? What about our church building that we worship in? Will it be renovated or replaced in the future? Will it be converted into a bible college or some other function? Consider the new building at Peace Lutheran College. Will have a limited life span or will it stand the test of time? What about the buildings of the world – you might think here about the World Trade Centre, also known as the “Twin Towers”. Surely it was expected that these giants in the sky would last forever as a symbol of the economic power of America and those who drove her finances? Like the temple Jesus and his disciples sat in, no building lasts forever and so we encouraged to put our hope into something more substantial, more enduring than the greatest building you could imagine.

## **Signs of this age**

The disciples asked Jesus when all these things would take place. They wanted to know the future so they could plan accordingly. Jesus gives his disciples fair warning by describing the drama of false prophets; of wars and conflict; of earthquakes and natural disasters.

Let's pause for a moment and consider the world in which we live and how we learn about our world. Once upon a time we would get our news from those we spoke to. The world around us was small and it was easy to keep abreast of what was happening in our part of the world. In fact if someone came into the community it was big news and there was great excitement as the world expanded just that little bit more. The advent of newspapers made it easier for more and more people to get not only the events in their local community, but also from the larger world, even if it may have been a little bit out of date. Radio broadened people's ability to learn more about the world even further. I still remember footage of cricket commentators reading a description of games being played in England, then adding the drama and spice to their broadcast so it seemed the listeners were really at the game. It went so far that they used to tap end of a pencil against the desk to simulate the sound of the bat hitting the ball.

The introduction of television sped up the delivery of news and dramatically increased the ability to convey what was happening in other parts of the country and the world. The Vietnam War is remembered for many reasons and one of those is that it was the first conflict where images of war were beamed live into our homes. All of a sudden we were invaded with a world that was much larger and much more dangerous than we were used to. This inflow of information has continued to increase to the point where we have the internet and many of us can instantaneously gain the latest updates on what is happening anywhere in the world.

The more we peer at the world and look at the signs of this age, what is it that we are seeing? Aren't we seeing the wars and conflicts, the natural disasters and loss of life that Jesus warned us about. Does this mean we are to expect the end of the world at any time?

## **The last days**

These are the last days of the world – just as Jesus predicted. But what we forget is that we have been in the *last days* ever since Jesus died on the cross and was raised to new life three days later. It was then that the temple in Jerusalem ceased to function as God's dwelling place here on earth. The curtain separating the Holy of Holies was torn from the top to the bottom – indicating that this was God's work, not humanities. Whether the temple still stands or not is no longer important. Whether this church building lasts for years or is sold off to the highest bidder doesn't matter regarding your faith or salvation. What remains is and will always be Jesus Christ who is the head of the living church. You are the living stones of Jesus' church which bound together with him will remain forever and ever.

The signs of the end of the age will remain and we should respond to them accordingly. To continue turning to Jesus Christ as our Saviour and to share this good news with others who remain trapped into thinking that the possessions, buildings and wealth created in this world will last at all. I think we all want the best for our families and especially for our children and grandchildren. We work hard to provide the material things of life. This is a good and blessed gift we provide, but continue to remind those we love that the best gift and the only gift that lasts forever is the little child born to us in Bethlehem.

It is through Jesus that we are drawn into our new relationship with God. As the writer to the Hebrews said, "the new and living way that [Jesus] opened for us through the curtain... and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." (Heb 12:20-22)

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.