

In today's Gospel lesson, we hear just the beginning of Jesus' description of the events that precipitate the inauguration of the kingdom of God in its fullness, which actually takes up all of Mark's 13th chapter. In it, Jesus is reminding his disciples that our times—our past, our present, our future—are in God's hands. Not that God controls every action, as if there is no such thing as human choice or agency, but that God will work God's purposes out within human history, within time and space, on this earth, until God brings about the new heavens and a new earth.

The disciples ask Jesus when this will happen, and Jesus answers them by not answering them. Instead, he tells them to be **faithful, not fearful**, to set their minds on **trusting and being aware**, rather than **worrying about a calendar**. Jesus' words are meant to put an end to any speculation about when the end of time as we know it will happen. Jesus says, don't worry about knowing when. That's not yours to know. But there are things you can know. (*The Rev. Dr. Amy Richter is an Episcopal priest serving in the Anglican Diocese of Western Newfoundland, Canada*)

### The Bedrock of Faith

Have you ever tried to make a prediction? Here are some predictions from the past. All from people who were trusted individuals:

1. Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, in 1943 said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

There was an inventor by the name of Lee DeForest. He claimed that "While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially it is an impossibility."

3. The Decca Recording Co. made a big mistake when they made this prediction: "We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out." That was their prediction in 1962 concerning a few lads from Liverpool. Their band was called the Beatles.

As the disciples walked out of the Temple in Jerusalem Jesus paused, looked back at the Temple and predicted, "Do you see all these great buildings. Not one stone will be left on another." To the disciples this was bedrock. Nothing could bring down these walls. "Look, teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" they said to Jesus. The **smallest stones in the structure weighed 2 to 3 tons. Many of them weighed 50 tons.** The largest existing stone, part of the Wailing Wall, is 36 ft. in length and 9 ft. high, and it weighs **hundreds of tons!** The stones were so immense that neither mortar nor any other binding material was used between the stones. Their stability was attained by the great weight of the stones. The walls towered over Jerusalem, over **400 feet in one area.** Inside the four walls was **45 acres of bedrock mountain shaved flat** and during Jesus' day a **quarter of a million people could fit** comfortably within the structure. No sports structure in America today comes close. You can then understand the disciples' surprise. As they walked down the Kidron Valley and up Mount Olive Peter, James, and John wanted to hear more. Jesus' prediction that a structure so immense would be leveled to the ground seemed implausible. But they pressed Jesus for more information. They wanted to know when. What would be the sign that this was about to take

place? In their voice was fear. **Fear of the unknown. Fear that their lives were about to change forever.** Jesus had not made any predictions like this one. This was different. This, they could understand. Forty years later Jesus' prediction came true. In 70 AD the Temple was destroyed by Rome. What are we to learn from this prediction and its fulfillment?

1. The bedrock of faith is not in Temples.
2. The bedrock of faith is not in Signs.
3. The bedrock of faith is in Christ.

Here is the story of a man who endured unspeakable suffering in his life, but triumphed in the end. The man was a politician, a member of the New York State Assembly. One day a telegram arrived in his office in Albany. It contained a single three-word sentence: **"Come home now!"** Not long before, his wife had given birth to a baby girl; he had gone back to work thinking all was well, but it was not. The young man took the next train back to his home in New York City, and as he walked through the door of his house, his brother greeted him with a strange lament: "There's a curse on this house." Rushing up to the bedroom, he found that his **wife, Alice, lay dying** from unforeseen complications of childbirth. He sat and held her, and could be heard pleading: "Let her live, let her live." Sometime during the night, a family member intruded on their solitude, whispering into his ear, "If you want to see your mother before she dies, come downstairs now." The man left his wife and walked down a flight of stairs into his **mother's room, where he held her until she died at 3 a.m.** He returned immediately to his wife's bedside, where he kept vigil until she also died, at **two that afternoon.** As heavy grief descended on that household, occasionally there could be heard the cry of his infant daughter, who was now without a mother. The man opened his daily diary and slashed a huge "X" across that day's page. There he scribbled: **"The light has gone out of my life."** The date was February 14, 1884: **ironically, it was Valentine's Day.** Two days later, as identical rosewood caskets were brought into New York's Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, friends observed that this doubly bereaved man was "in a dazed, stunned state." They wondered if he would ever recover. He did, though. As difficult and painful as that Valentine's Day was for him, he did recover. Over time, he would find healing. He would marry again. Professionally, he would serve as assistant **secretary of the Navy, governor of New York, and president of the United States.** His name was **Theodore Roosevelt.** In his later life, he would triumph not only over personal tragedy, but also over political and professional defeat. (adapted from a story told by Victor Parachin *Tending a Wounded Heart*, in *Plus* magazine, December, 2002, pp. 25-27.)

### **Humor: False Prophets and Messiahs**

Several years ago, Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks did a comedy skit called the "2013 Year Old Man". In the skit, Reiner interviews Brooks, who is the old gentleman. At one point, Reiner asks the old man, "Did you always believe in the Lord?" Brooks replied: "No. We had a guy in our village named Phil, and for a time we worshiped him." Reiner: You worshiped a guy named Phil? Why? Brooks: Because he was big, and mean, and he could break you in two with his bare hands! Reiner: Did you have prayers? Brooks: Yes, would you like to hear one? O Phil, please don't be mean, and hurt us, or break us in two with your bare hands. Reiner: So when did you start worshiping the Lord? Brooks: Well, one day a big thunderstorm came up, and a lightning bolt hit Phil. We gathered around and saw that he was dead. Then we said to one another, "There's somthin' bigger than Phil!" (by Tim Carpenter from *Sermon Illustrations*)