

GOSPEL GOSSIP

Not one stone standing

St Mark 13. 1-8

Sunday 14 November 2021

It's well-known that the first disciples Jesus called were probably simple, uncomplicated men. Many of them had been fishermen; most had been brought up or lived by the Sea of Galilee. Homes and towns would have been small, and comprising simple, single-storeyed dwellings, perhaps roofed with reeds gathered from the shore line. What are described as cities in the gospels were really large towns. Perhaps for them, the biggest building with which they were familiar was their local synagogue. Maybe some had even ventured as far as Jerusalem on pilgrimage. There can be no doubt that the sight of that truly large city, dominated by the vast Temple complex and magnificent buildings would have blown them away.

It is in this jaw-dropping context that Jesus makes a jaw-dropping challenge: Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. He is mocked. People knew how much labour and cost, physical and emotional, had gone into the buildings' construction, how much time, and here was Jesus saying apparently that the temple would be rebuilt in just three says. And to make it clear, Mark adds that the temple Jesus was speaking of was his own body.

- Do you take pride in our buildings more than your faith?
- Are you more concerned with the maintenance of buildings than souls?
- Can you always believe the words of Jesus?
- Do Jesus' 'shock' statements alarm, challenge or antagonise you?
- Should Christians shake the fabric of society?

Jesus uses the disciples' wonder at the Temple to teach them about what is to come, and how to prepare for it. Destroying the Temple is an obvious reference to his death and resurrection, and Jesus often is preparing the disciples for 'the worst'. He speaks in parables, in riddles almost, to demonstrate the difference between the physical and spiritual, using the world around him to illustrate the world to come, and to show that faith is stronger than fear.

- Are you tempted to cling to the human, rather than the resurrected, Christ?
- When your faith is challenged or faltering, do you look elsewhere for reassurance?
- Can you cope with the continuous upheaval that faith can bring to your life?
- Do you long for the status quo and find change hard or unacceptable?
- Does fear ever paralyse your faith?

As it happens, Jesus' words were fulfilled, when within a generation or so the Romans finally destroyed the Temple, for it never to be rebuilt. All its worldly and tangible artefacts have been lost. Many were paraded as signs of conquest. Against this finality of a building, the finality of death, we have the finality of Jesus' words in St Matthew's Gospel: 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'