

GATHERING SONG

“Church (Take Me Back)”

WELCOME

Pastor Melody

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: O God, you are the gathering one who calls us into community with each other,

People: to love and work, to support and heal.

Leader: You are the gathering one who calls us into community with all people;

People: to bring justice and hope, freedom and truth.

Leader: You are the gathering one who calls us into community with the whole creation;

People: to live in harmony, to cherish and renew.

Leader: Let us worship the God who makes us one.

Please join us in singing our song of praise:

SONG OF PRAISE

“We Gather Together” (hymn #131)

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and merciful One, we thank you for the community in which you have placed us, for the brothers and sisters with whom we walk this pilgrim journey. Yet, we confess that we fail to love as you love. We build walls that separate us: from you, from one another, from the world, even from ourselves. We place stumbling blocks in the way of goodness and truth. We are led astray by promises of earthly treasure. Teach us to pray and praise without pause, confessing hope ceaselessly. Guide us in our efforts to encourage one another, to work together for good in the world, and to prepare for the day of the Lord.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Be assured that God’s love is present for you in the caring of this community and in the offering of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Be assured that the ways of God’s love are still surprising and mysterious and are at work in you and among us all. For this awesome love, we give our thanks and praise. Amen.

Please be seated.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Hebrews 10:19-25; Mark 13:1-8 (CEB)

Our first scripture reading is from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, chapter 10 verses 19-25, reading from the Common English Bible translation:

¹⁹ Brothers and sisters, we have confidence that we can enter the holy of holies by means of Jesus’ blood, ²⁰through a new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain, which is his body, ²¹and we have a great high priest over God’s house.

²² Therefore, let’s draw near with a genuine heart with the certainty that our faith gives us, since our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water.

²³ Let's hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable.

²⁴ And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. ²⁵ Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.

Say: Our gospel lesson is Mark 13:1-8:

As Jesus left the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Teacher, look! What awesome stones and buildings!"

² Jesus responded, "Do you see these enormous buildings? Not even one stone will be left upon another. All will be demolished."

³ Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives across from the temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, when will these things happen? What sign will show that all these things are about to come to an end?"

⁵ Jesus said, "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many people will come in my name, saying, 'I'm the one!' They will deceive many people. ⁷ When you hear of wars and reports of wars, don't be alarmed. These things must happen, but this isn't the end yet. ⁸ Nations and kingdoms will fight against each other, and there will be earthquakes and famines in all sorts of places. These things are just the beginning of the sufferings associated with the end.

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and living of this Word. Amen.

Children are invited to children's chapel

At this time children in preschool through 6th grades are invited to follow our children's leaders to the education wing for Children's Chapel – they'll return to us during the closing song. As they leave, let us sing a song of reflection:

SONG OF REFLECTION "Great Is Thy Faithfulness (Beginning to End)"

SERMON "Thanks-Loving: Gratitude for the Beloved Community"

Last week we read in Mark's gospel how Jesus sat across from the Temple treasury observing a religious system that had become corrupt with greed and ambition for status and power, preying upon the poor instead of caring for them. Today, Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives observing the Temple itself. It's important for us to know a few details about the timeline of events concerning the Temple:

Herod the Great began a major reconstruction of the Temple in 20 BC, so from the time Jesus was born, the Temple had been under construction. And Herod the Great – the same Herod who ordered the slaughter of all males under the age of two when he heard about Jesus's birth – was intent on this construction project helping to seal his name in history. The original Temple was built by King David's son Solomon, then mostly destroyed by the Babylonians around 587 BC. When the Persians conquered Babylon, they allowed the Israelites in exile to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. It was built to roughly the same size as the original Temple, but without the extravagant riches the first Temple held. It's likely that the Temple was badly damaged again during conflicts with Syrian rulers in the 170 – 160s BC.

When Herod decided to remodel, so to speak, he put 10,000 men to work and trained 1,000 priests as masons so they could work on the most sacred parts of the temple. This construction project incorporated massive quarried blocks. And these were the “large stones” – measuring 35 feet long by 18 feet wide by 12 feet high – that so impressed the disciples! It was also this project which added the outer courts and walls that begin to divide and segment people off from one another so that non-Jews and women were restricted from the inner courts which were closest to the holy of holies.

The renovations were not completely finished until A.D. 64. Six years later in A.D. 70, the Romans burned down and destroyed the temple at Jerusalem and it has never been rebuilt since. Mark’s gospel was written just about this time, somewhere between 66-70 A.D. So Mark would have been recounting Jesus’ life and teachings at the time of the Jewish revolt when the Temple actually came crashing down. So what Jesus says is really a word of hope in the midst of world-changing chaos.

Jesus warns the disciples that the massive stones and architecture of the Temple they are so wooed by are only a façade – the kingdom which Jesus is revealing will not be built with stones because Jesus himself is the cornerstone. Jesus has been revealing himself to be the Messiah, the Anointed One who will indeed sit on a throne – but it will be a throne of grace in a new realm, in God’s new world order – not inside this monstrosity of a building. The kingdom God is building won’t be overthrown by any government or military power. Jesus came to reveal to us a kingdom that is being built by love. And that is the hope that Jesus tries to impart to his disciples before his crucifixion.

I love the Common English bible translation because of the way it goes back to the original Hebrew and Greek and translates into today’s English vernacular... but in Mark 13:8, the translators over-simplified the Greek word *ōdin* – as sufferings. But it is a feminine noun that actually denotes the sufferings of childbirth, or as other translations put it, “birth pangs.” So that when Jesus begins warning the disciples about these Temple stones coming down, and of nations rising against nations and of famines and earthquakes, Jesus is actually telling them, “This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”

It’s not an ending, but a beginning. When their physical Temple is destroyed, it is part of the pain and suffering of birthing something new into being.

In our lectionary this reading is paired with a selection from the letter to the Hebrews, reminding these first Christians... at a time when their Temple itself may have been destroyed, that it was important to keep meeting together, to spark one another on toward works of love.

How many of you know the children’s song, “the church is not a building; the church is not a steeple; the church is not a resting place; the church is a people.”

So if the church today is a “people” and part of the new heaven and earth that Jesus came to reveal, that he entrusted us to build... then what are the stones that are going to build us up, so to speak? If we are the church, what is our beloved community built on? What are the

spiritual gifts that each of us bring to build up a community of faith, of hope, of love? What passions do we bring that helps us to see the world as Jesus sees it – to see the hungry and hurting and broken and lost? And what skills are here that will enable us to put our gifts to use in the ministries that meet those needs?

Jesus told his disciples to stay alert – because we can get so discouraged by the crumbling of the world around us. It can be all too easy to listen to other voices who try to persuade us to give in to our fears, to build up walls, to separate and segregate, or to give up altogether. Jesus warned us not to listen to these voices – but to expect that the world we live in will always be in some state of alarm – of war – of loss... but that we are part of the new creation that God is birthing through us. We are the church: I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together! It takes every one of us, with all of our varied gifts and talents and passions, to be the church God has called us to be. May it be so. Amen.

JOYS & CONCERNS

PASTORAL PRAYER / LORD'S PRAYER

Disturbing God, your generosity of grace knows no bounds; it is unfathomable in depth, immeasurable in breadth.

You disturb us, provoke us, challenge us to do the same—to offer our resources, our gifts, our passions to make right relations, to feed the hungry, to resist evil, to stand for justice, to work for dignity for all.

We pray that you soften our hearts, and open us wider to serve You with energy and imagination.

We pray now for all the brokenness we are aware of in this world... *(silent prayer)*

We pray now for those who suffer from illness of all kinds... *(silent prayer)*

We pray now for the concerns that simmer in our hearts... *(silent prayer)*

We pray now for the prayers that we have no words for... *(silent prayer)*

We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus, our brother, our teacher, our redeemer, who taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

OFFERING / ANNOUNCEMENTS

In gratitude for all the blessings God continues to pour into our lives, we receive this morning's offering. Your gift in-person, by mail or mobile device, or online at www.polkcityumc.org/give supports the ministry, outreach, and operations of your church. Thank you for your extravagant generosity!

Let us dedicate these gifts:

Today, O Lord, we offer you our sacrifice of time, energy, and love, knowing full well they are mere tokens of the awesome faith you inspire within us. Accept these gifts, that they may continue the good work in Christ — in our church, in our community, and in the world. Blessed be the name of the Lord! Amen.

OFFERING OUR SERVICE (TIME & TALENTS)

Friends, we are the church. And empowered by the Holy Spirit, we support the powerless, the voiceless, and the overlooked; we give our time, talent, and treasures in ways that proclaim what we believe—using words when necessary; we allow our spiritual gifts to lead us to where they intersect with what God is already doing, already building, already birthing; and we invite others to join in the building of faith, in the confessing of unwavering hope, and in becoming Christ's beloved community; and we pray to speak and act bravely in the face of evil--in whatever form it presents itself.

And so today, we make our commitments to offer our time, talents and gifts as God's church.

SONG OF SENDING

"My Feet Are On the Rock"

BENEDICTION