

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

November 17-18

“Birth Pangs of a New Day”

By Rev. Keith Herron

What Is This?

This brief guide is intended for use individually, or in small groups. It's your chance to dive deeper into the issues raised in the weekend sermon and to connect a Biblical story with your daily life.

Revisit the Text

Mark 13:1-8; <https://bit.ly/2DjCWaH>

Big Ideas Raised

The Temple stood majestically on the peak of Mount Zion, a tabletop plaza that towered over the old city of King David. The Temple courtyard walls were of white marble that glistened in the bright sunshine. Massive stone columns majestically lined the perimeter of the Temple Mount holding up the porches that surrounded God's great earthly plateau. The Temple itself, straddling Mount Zion, the peak of which was reportedly where Abraham prepared to slay Isaac as a human sacrifice to God. The Temple Mount in its immensity was some 37 acres in all, and the Temple was over a hundred feet tall. The walls of the Temple were covered with great sheets of gold that nearly blinded the approaching visitors. From a distance, the Temple Mount was a brilliant spectacle. Josephus wrote of a winter scene in which the gold on the temple “reflected so fierce a blaze of fire that those who tried to look at it were forced to turn away ... it seemed in the distance like a mountain covered in snow, for any part not covered in gold was dazzling white.”

It was the week of Passover when Jesus and his disciples entered Jerusalem, a time when the city was bloated with religious pilgrims. During Passover, it is estimated that the city's population swelled from its normal 25,000 to as many as 125,000 people, and one can only imagine the congestion of pilgrims and priests, beasts and blood, and lots and lots of money. It must have been mind-boggling. And there they all stood, gaping at the blinding wonder of it all and thinking about how magnificent it all was, when Jesus blurted out the stunning words, “Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down” (Mark 13:2, NRSV).

Questions Meant to Dig Deeper

- Jesus' warning to be ready to be persecuted for your faith has a long and storied history of truthfulness in world history. And we shouldn't grow too accustomed to the protections that we currently enjoy and assume they couldn't develop even here. True, there are places in the world today where a Christian witness is not safe. Persecution comes in nations throughout Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.
- There are Christian doomsayers who add to the cultural hysteria with their warnings. And Jesus tells us simply, “Do not go after them.” Do not be terrified. When the sky is falling? When the world is coming to an end? That's right. Do not go after them. Do not be terrified. Don't you hear the comforting words of Jesus throughout the gospels?
- At the heart of this vignette is the question of what role Christ plays in our lives. To claim “Jesus is Lord,” is to also pronounce “Caesar is not Lord,” something that could cause one to be persecuted. What does that mean to you?

Revisit the Sermon

For a recording or a manuscript of this weekend's sermon, please visit: <https://www.stlucasucc.org/sermons-resources>