

“Living With Change”
(Mark 13:1-8)

11/17/24
Rev. James Koyama

Home

Last Sunday Rev. Sadler-Twyon preached about the meaning of the word “home”. She talked about how home is much more than the buildings we inhabit and how our true home is not a physical location, but something that is within each one of us and among us. As Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God is neither over here nor over there, but within and among us.”

Our true home is something we carry in our hearts, and no matter where we are, whenever our hearts are being moved by God’s love, we are at home. That home is always there for us to take refuge in and it cannot be taken from us, without our consent. And all our true loves are always there, never to be lost.

I think that this is an extremely reassuring thing to know, because just about everything else will be taken from us. Technologies change, norms change, faces change. The world is constantly changing, and things that are familiar to us, that brought us comfort, and that we once thought of as permanent are gone in a flash. This has always been the case.

Home in a Changing World

And so it comes as a relief to discover that we have a true home that is not subject to the instability and unreliability of the material world.

That it has always been there for us, and will always be there for us, and that it has always been and always and everywhere will be, governed by the same love that greeted us on the day we were born. And the fact that it is something invisible that we carry with us doesn't diminish its value or its power to reassure us. It only increases our confidence, once we recognize it.

Jesus is making the same point in this morning's Gospel reading. While his disciples marvel at the magnificence of the Jerusalem temple, Jesus's is surprisingly unimpressed. Instead of "wowing" over it with them, his response is that "not one stone will be left upon another" and that the entire temple will be reduced to rubble.

It is a pretty shocking thing for him to say, given that the temple is almost certainly the most impressive building his disciples have ever seen. Not only that, it is also the geographical center of their religion. It is the place where their ancestors came to meet God and where they come to meet God as well. So, if anything symbolized "home" to the

people of Israel, it would have been the temple in Jerusalem. It was their “sanctuary.”

But Jesus clearly wants to free his disciples from the mesmerizing hold the temple has on them. For Jesus, our relationship with God is our true “home” and nothing constructed by human hands, no matter how impressive, should be mistaken for the magnificence and permanence of that true home, the temple to God in our hearts. And barely twenty years later, as Jesus predicts, the temple in Jerusalem is in fact reduced to rubble.

This message of Jesus, not to put our faith in things constructed with human hands, no matter how mesmerizing they may be, is also a central teaching in Tibetan Buddhism, which makes the same point with the ritual construction and destruction of mandalas.

A mandala is a circular drawing that represents a vision of the universe and how it all works. Various gods and levels of reality are drawn out, often on cloth or as paintings that can sometimes be very large and intricate.

And there is a ritual in which large mandalas are made by pouring tiny grains of colored sand onto the floor or platform. The sand is poured

out bit by bit, carefully, painstakingly, drawing out this large multi-colored vision of reality. It typically takes several weeks to put one together. Then the completed mandala is admired and shortly afterwards it is ritually destroyed. All the sand is swept aside and thrown into a river.

The sweeping away of the mandala is done as a demonstration of the impermanence of all things in the material world. It is a ritual way of trying to understand and cope with the fact that a reality we have worked so painstakingly to put together, that we have lived in and that has fed our lives and become reality itself for us, can be suddenly swept away, for example, when a flash flood takes away a family home, or when faith in a marriage is destroyed by betrayal.

But the monks who create the mandalas and then sweep them away, don't seem overly devastated by losing all that they have worked for. And Jesus also, unlike his disciples does not seem to be overly taken with the magnificence of the temple. Both Jesus and the Buddhist monks remain calm observers because their lives don't depend on what happens in the ever changing material world. They are anchored in an invisible sanctuary that is eternal and cannot be compromised or destroyed.

It is a deeper unseen reality with which we are connected, that is not of our making, but that is permeated with God's love for the world. And for us as Christians this deeper reality is our home. It is the Good Shepherd's fold. It is the place from which true strength and courage. It is our sanctuary. And although we symbolize it here (point to church) the place where it truly exists is in here (point to the heart).

Washed away Overnight

I think it is worth considering, in this divided country that for roughly half the voting population, it seemed as though, in one moment, the hopes and possibilities of a brighter future suddenly became brighter; that a monkey that had been on its back had been thrown off and things could now happen that could once have only been hoped for. For this half of the voting population, November 5th was a vindication.

But for another roughly half of the voting population, it was as though the hopes for a bright future were dashed, swept away like the remains of an inspiring and painstakingly constructed mandala. What will happen to the movement toward environmental sustainability, what will happen to NATO and to the people of the Ukraine and Europe and to the people in the Gaza? Can we survive another four years of name-calling and lies?

Regardless of the result, one half of our country was bound to walk away feeling vindicated and hopeful, while the other would struggle with cynicism and despair. I won't pretend that I am not deeply disappointed and I hope, for the sake of the world, that I will be wrong about a lot of things.

But I think that in this moment, an important thing for us to remember, as people of faith, is that our true experience of home and our ultimate security are not things that can be created for us or given to us, nor can it be taken from us by any political party or administration. Our true home is in here (point to the heart) when all our relationships are permeated with God's love. And for that we can all be grateful and joyful, no matter where we are and which way the world is going.