

1

When driving across country, how many of you have seen signs warning you about falling rocks? Where do you encounter such signs? Most likely while driving along roads surrounded by steep cliffs! The risk in not seeing such a sign could result in tragedy if rocks begin to fall (or even if signs begin to fall). There may be some signs that provide confusing warnings, such as a sign for falling rocks in a handicapping parking zone. Is it safe to park there or not? But have you ever encountered warning signs with strange messages, such as... (falling cows, falling people, falling aliens)?

When I visited Jerusalem several years ago, there were no warning signs near the ancient walls, but I wondered if maybe there should have been warning signs at some time in history, for as I walked alongside the walls I encountered literally tons of rocks that had fallen during destructive battles. I was also able to tour the area underneath the city streets, exploring the original walls that can be seen underground. Through this visit I began to

get a sense of the scale of this massive construction built thousands of years ago.

A few months ago during our Wednesday evening Bible study, we watched a video about what the temple and surrounding walls in Jerusalem might have looked like during Jesus' life. We heard about the massive stones used to build the structures, with most stones ranging anywhere from two to five tons.<sup>1</sup> The largest one that has been found measures 39x10x13 feet, which weighs about 400 tons!

As our Bible study group learned more about the temple, we marveled at how it had been constructed long before hydraulic cranes existed. We thought of the hard work of the stone masons who cut these stones by hand without electric tools, and those who had to transport the stones without diesel trucks. We were amazed at the long period of time it took to create such a huge structure, which had been built, destroyed, and rebuilt several times over hundreds of years.

2

And then our group encountered the words in Mark's Gospel: while Jesus and the disciples were walking through Jerusalem and marveling at the size and beauty of the temple, Jesus replied, "There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." The disciples wondered what in the world Jesus was talking about, for the stones were massive—how could anyone knock them over? Jesus explained that in coming years nations would rise against nations, earthquakes and famines would occur, and many would face persecution. In other words, there would be so much destruction in the world that even the temple walls would come crashing down. Due to the massive size of the stones, that idea would have been something hard for them to imagine.

In the year 70, however, the Romans did attack Jerusalem, bringing an eerie truth to the words in Mark's Gospel. Although the walls around Jerusalem were thick, through the use of giant battering rams the Romans were able to breach the wall and enter

the city. The historian Josephus noted that Caesar wanted some of the walls and towers to remain as an example of how magnificent their army had been to breach the mighty walls.

Mark wrote his Gospel around the same time period as the destruction of Jerusalem, so by telling the story of Jesus and the falling stones, Mark may have been reflecting on an event that had already happened. He may have seen the destruction of the walls, knowing firsthand the terror of the Roman armies.

Neither you nor I may have witnessed such large-scale destruction in our own cities, and yet, we know such destruction does exist in the world. We've recently heard of the hurricane on the east coast, earthquakes this month in Mexico and Central America, and the latest in the war in Palestinian-Israeli war with the airstrikes in the Gaza Strip this past week. It may feel as though rocks are falling all around us, as though the foundations of

life are crumbling. Even our economic systems around the globe seem to be crumbling.

In the midst of the falling rocks, this week we will celebrate Thanksgiving, giving thanks for what we do have in life. Sometimes it may feel difficult to give thanks, knowing the rocks that seem to be falling around us. And yet, I think each one of us here can find something for which to give thanks...

In this month's newsletter I wrote, "When we get frustrated with our personal finances or even what appears to be a declining membership or finances in the local or larger church, we can still celebrate what God continues to do in the world. Where we perceive a shortage, God senses surplus. Where we perceive sorrow, God offers hope. Where we perceive disappointment, God offers renewal. God invites us to offer words of good news to one another even when life is not perfect."

One former member of our congregation who no longer lives in the area but still receives our

newsletter via email wrote back to me, replying to my words about "Where we perceive a shortage, God senses surplus." She wrote: "Spot on. Align your thought with God's, and the loaves and fishes follow. Thank you." She used the imagery from the story of Jesus taking a few loaves and fishes to feed a large crowd.

Oftentimes we only focus on the few loaves of bread and the couple of fish that we have, thereby missing how God can multiple our small efforts into amazing results. With all the stones falling around us, it may seem as though the world is coming to an end, and we may feel there is nothing we can offer.

Martin Luther [who sparked the Protestant Reformation] was once asked what he would do if he knew that the world was coming to an end tomorrow, and he said: "I would plant an apple tree." In other words, Luther, trusting in God's gracious, unmerited mercy would live life just as he had been living it. When John Wesley [the

④

early leader of the Methodist Church] was asked the same thing...he said that he would arise at 4:00 AM, preach at 5:00, visit the sick at 7:00, go to communion at 8:00...etc., until the questioner realized that that was exactly what Wesley had planned to do tomorrow anyway!<sup>2</sup>

Both leaders remind us that even when life seems to be bleak, when it seems as though stones

are falling all around us, we can continue living in hope. No matter what happens, we can trust that God's abundant care will continue to fill our lives. And that is something for which we can give thanks, not only this week at Thanksgiving, but each and every day of the year!

---

<sup>1</sup> See [www.abu.nb.ca/courses/ntintro/jerusaltempl4.htm](http://www.abu.nb.ca/courses/ntintro/jerusaltempl4.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Donald B. Strobe, Collected Words, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com)