

**SERMON: 18 November 2018 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

**“EVERYTHING IS SPIRITUAL”  
(Hebrews 10:11-25 and Mark 13:1-8 )**

1

Since the 8th century BC, the Temple in Jerusalem was seen as the place of God’s particular presence, the very centre of the Jewish world, the place where heaven touched earth. And though the First Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586BC, rebuilding started some 30 years later. Herod the Great then modified the Temple between 19BC and 63AD. How awful then, that the Temple is completely destroyed in 70AD; a destruction which Jesus of Nazareth, some 40 years earlier, predicted in these verses we read today. See these fine buildings? It’s all coming down.

One who was greater than the Temple was in their midst; but they couldn’t see it.

2

Though the Temple in Jesus’ day was meant to be the meeting place of heaven and earth, it had become corrupt. It wasn’t functioning in the way it was meant to. It wasn’t blessing people in the way God intended to bless people through it.

3

Teaching in the Temple courts, Jesus prepares his followers not to be put off with earthquakes, famines, riots, wars and rumours of wars. They were not to think of these events as being signs of the end. Rather they were to see them as birth pains of a new age.

Nothing new comes without pain of some sort. Mothers who give birth know this better than anyone. Men like me will never know, we can only imagine what you women have to go through. Man flu doesn’t even come close.

Perhaps we can surmise that nothing new comes without pain. The coming of the Messiah and the coming of God's Kingdom, would shake things up so much that it would be painful for some to bear.

God sent Jesus, as the Living Breath of God, to usher in the kingdom of heaven in an new age of the Spirit.

As Hebrews 10:20 puts it, through "a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,"

This new age of the Spirit is beyond space (and time). The particular place that was the Temple, was no longer to be seen as the only place where people could meet with the Divine Spirit, who is God.

People could now "draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." [Hebrews 10:22]. Baptism and faith would be all that would be needed.

The prophets had spoken about this day; the day when the ways of God would be written on the human heart. And on the mind. It would no longer be necessary for people to be taught God's ways. They would instinctively know the ways of God.

The Temple had had its place; as a *form* through which people could discover God, but it was only ever a temporary vessel or a vehicle, to make that happen. It itself was not the thing. Only God is the thing. And if the vessel stops doing what it was set up to do, point to God, then it'd need to be torn down; hence what Jesus said.

The problem with seeing the Temple as the only real sacred space was to imply that all other spaces were not sacred. The implication of that is that God is no longer everywhere. God is only to be found in certain places. That can't be right. That's idolatry. That's making certain places into idols.

There's no doubt the church has done this in the past, and to some extent is still doing it, so much so, that like those first disciples, we often can't bear

the thought of buildings being altered, let alone the whole lot coming crashing down.

I remember reading something that Rob Bell wrote in which he said “the whole thing is a temple”. I think he’s right. There isn’t a divide between the sacred and the secular. It’s not helpful for us to think in those dualistic terms. Because that’s when we start to say that God is limited, and we begin to categorise places and people in terms of their spiritual importance.

And whilst I believe that some places are thin places (like Iona), I believe too, that all places can be thin; because every place has the potential to be a place where God the Spirit can touch our spirit.

It’s helpful to think that every experience in life is an encounter with the Divine. All of life is sacred.

An example of this might be found in Jesus use of the parable in Matthew 25:40 when he says

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

In other words, God, the King in the story, is present in that everyday encounter.

4

So here’s what I think we need to do. We need to let divisions come crashing down. We need to stop thinking of the world in terms of a divided world, where some jobs are more holy than others; where some callings are more holy than other callings; where some spaces are more sacred than others; where prayers said in church are more holy than the groans we give in the night or the awe we feel at the sight of a sunset. It’s all sacred. It’s all holy. God is present in everyone, everywhere. There is nowhere in creation that God can’t be. There is no situation God can’t take part in or change for good.

Let’s not think that only things done in the church building matter most. Let’s begin to see that we can discover God in everyone,

everywhere. Let's be involved in local community groups as well as groups which make use of the church buildings.

Let's go from here to discover the presence of God in all of life, in every person we meet, in every place, in all of creation. Everything is spiritual.

Let's remember too that we carry the living presence of the Risen Christ with us, into whatever situation we go into. His presence in us, is making us fully ourselves, and is making us to be part of the gift of God to one another.

Let's spur one another on to love and good deeds and "not giving up meeting together".

In the name of our life giving, loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.