

### “She’s Only Just Begun”

When I was a child, my family went to Richmond a couple of times a year. For us kids Richmond seemed like a big city especially compared to our tiny town of Fredericksburg. That changed one year when I went with my dad on two buying trips. The trips were for visiting wholesale nurseries to buy plant stock for the family nursery. The first trip took us up to Annapolis and down the Eastern Shore, across the Bay Bridge Tunnel, down into North Carolina and then home. As big an adventure as that first trip was, the second one was amazing. For that trip we went to Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Long Island and then to New York City. While there were no nurseries there, my dad surprised me with a day of sightseeing in the Big Apple.

We drove into the city on a Sunday morning. I was surprised at the density of the buildings and how tall they were. I would push my face against the window to try to look up at the height of the buildings. We drove down the docks and saw the great ocean liner the S.S. United States. Across the water we saw the Statue of Liberty. Then my dad parked the car. I had no idea what we were going to do on foot. We walked up to a ticket booth and bought tickets to take the ferry to the Statue of Liberty. What a surprise. I had seen photos of the statue but now we were actually going to see it up close and personal. When we arrived on the island, we walked around the base and went inside to read the poem “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus.<sup>1</sup> Then, to my surprise, he bought tickets for us to climb up to the crown. This twelve-year-old boy from rural Virginia was awestruck.

The disciples in today’s Gospel reading were a lot like that twelve-year-old boy. They were overwhelmed by the city of Jerusalem. Remember these guys were hicks from the backwater of Galilee. There were no big cities in Galilee, just small towns, and fishing villages. They could not get over the number of people in Jerusalem for the festival of Passover, the size of the city, and the density of the buildings. But what really amazed them was the Temple. The Temple Mount, as expanded under King Herod, covered more than thirty-five acres. The walls were ten stories tall, and their foundations were as much as sixty-five feet deep in order to reach bedrock.<sup>2</sup> While these guys were bumpkins from the boondocks of Galilee, I daresay that sophisticates like us would be just as amazed to see the great temple in all its glory.

Even as the disciples and others are wondering about this great feat of engineering that is the most holy place in their world, Jesus tells them, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” Jesus does not tell how this will happen or when. Some scholars think that the writer of the Gospel of Mark, may have put these words in Jesus’ mouth because the writer had seen the Temple destroyed by the Roman Army in 60 A.D.

That is not important as what Jesus says later as he and his disciples look back from across the Kidron Valley at the Temple from the Mount of Olives. There he tells his disciples of the cataclysms that will come upon the world. He also tells them of the signs that will be interpreted as foreshadowing of the cataclysms. This is Jesus at his most eschatological. This is Jesus looking to the end of time, the Eschaton, the Parousia. It is scary stuff as any prediction of the end of time usually is.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46550/the-new-colossus>

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the Temple see Jerusalem Insider’s Guide <https://www.jerusalem-insiders-guide.com/temple-of-jerusalem.html>

In light of his predictions, he adds a warning. He says, “Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.” Of course, he was right. Through the centuries since Jesus’ death and resurrection there have been numerous eschatological movements. The Seventh Day Adventist church was born out of the Millerite Movement that predicted the Second Coming of Jesus would happen in the early 1840s. My sixth grade Sunday School teachers believed that the Second Coming would be in the year 2000. Since the year 2000 there have been twenty prominent predictions of the end of time. Needless to say, none have come true. Yet some people seem to glom on to one prediction or another.

Following further statements about the end of time in this chapter of Mark, Jesus makes a critical statement that should undo anyone who ventures to predict the Parousia. He says, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” If Jesus does not know when the Eschaton will be who are we to say that we do? The Day of Judgment will be when it will be. It is not ours to worry about. What we are called to do is to live in the time that God has given us. We are to care for the world and each other as God has commanded us. We are to live as neighbors who love our neighbor and love our enemy.

Martin Luther said, “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.” He tells us that no matter what we may or may not believe our job is to live in the trust of the Lord. God’s call is to live in hope. That is it.

Today we will baptize a little girl named Sofia. That little girl was born of trust and hope in the Lord. She “was born of God’s “Yes,” and that yes is woven into her soul. Underneath all the incessant no’s is a yes longing to soar, straight into God. As she is baptized today, she will hear God say, “You are my beloved with your I am well pleased.” She is one part of our hope for the future of this world.

Our call as parents, godparents, grandparents, friends, and her community is to encourage her in her life in Christ. Encourage her on her journey. Lift her spirits with the memory of this day. This is a day she will not remember, but we can recall for her. A day we will remind her when the community of Emmanuel Church came together to witness her initiation into the Household of God, where she will be welcome and cherished all the days of her life.

Given the Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
The Seventeenth day of November  
The Year of Our Lord 2024  
For the baptism of Sofia Danker Ozdowski