

Mark 13: 1-8
Creekside COB
October 28, 2006

“No Super-Sizing”

For lack of a better term, I call it the “Wow! Factor.” When I witness something impressive, my usual response is, “Wow!” After the Concord Marching Band’s performance that won the State Championship in John’s senior year, I screamed, “Wow!!!” Last month in Canada when we *routinely* landed 5-pound smallmouth bass, “Wow!” was uttered repeatedly.

I subdivide the Wow Factor into categories, with the “wows” expressed in different ways depending upon the person, situation, or thing inspiring the utterance. “Wow!” uttered in response to a breath-taking autumn sunset is different from a “Wow!” used to express delight in a fine-tasting slice of apple pie.

Another category is, “Awe-full Wows... not *awful*, but full-of-awe “Wow’s” uttered when spectacular sights like the Grand Canyon or the Northern lights take your breath away. Today I am thinking about wonders made with the creative minds and skilled hands of people. The Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris is one example. What an awe-full experience it was to worship in that historic place.

Even more impressive to me was the Chartes Cathedral, visible from miles away, soaring above the horizon of the French countryside. The massive Gothic structure was built in 1194. When you enter, your eyes must adjust to the darkness. When mine did, the sight almost dropped me to my knees. Chartes has the most spectacular stained-glass windows of all the great gothic cathedrals. With the dark inside and the light outside, the brilliant windows sparkle like jewels. I had to crane by neck all the way back to behold the height of its enormous, vaulted

ceilings. It was warm outside, but inside the massive walls it was cool enough to wear a sweater.

The Chartes Cathedral has endured fires and wars and still stands as an architectural wonder. But as I was leaving the cathedral bookstore I thought of Jesus' words recorded in Mark. "You're impressed by this grandiose architecture? There's not a stone in the whole works that is not going to end up in a heap of rubble." Leave it to Jesus to spoil a "Wow!" moment.

Jesus and the disciples were leaving the Temple in Jerusalem. It was in the final stages of reconstruction that was started by Herod before Jesus' birth. The disciples were understandably awed by the architectural marvel. The perimeter of its 150-foot tall white marble walls was two-thirds of a mile long. Each of the wall's massive blocks weighed tons. There were ten entrance gates, each gilded in gold and silver. The most prominent entrance called, the Beautiful Gate had two 45-foot tall doors. The front of the Temple and portions of the sidewalls were plated in gold. The Golden Dome at Notre Dame couldn't hold a candle to it.

Leaving the Temple, Jesus took the disciples to the Mount of Olives, and from this vantage point they had a spectacular panorama of Jerusalem and in particular the Temple-- it's marble walls and metal embellishments glistening in the sun. "Wow! Look at that! Incredible! Where on earth can you find a building as beautiful as this? It ought to be on the cover of Architectural Digest. What do *you* think, Jesus?"

They should have known better than to ask such a thing. The things that impressed the disciples did not impress Jesus. "Take a good, long look at those grand buildings, gentlemen. It won't be long before they are reduced to rubble. Not a single stone in the whole thing will be left stacked on another." Leave it to Jesus to spoil a "Wow!" moment.

Alexander Mack, the founder of our denomination, wrote, "*Count well the cost,*" *Christ Jesus says, "when you lay the foundation."* The builders of the Temple had counted the cost of

their enterprise. The financial, material, and human resources had been procured. The massive scale of the new Temple made it seem inconceivable that it could be destroyed. But the building was compromised from the start because the foundation of Temple religion was inadequate. Judgment was impending because Israel was majoring in the minors of religion. They had pranced about on the surface of religiosity and had not probed the depths of God's will for their lives.

Jesus looked beneath the white marble and gold glistening in the sun. He looked beneath the pride the people had for the indestructible edifice and saw what was lacking.

The people were justifiably alarmed when Jesus predicted that their brand-spanking new Temple would be reduced to rubble. One of the charges against Jesus when he was brought before Caiaphas was that he said he would destroy the Temple made with hands, and in three days build another not made with hands. How would we have responded if, on the first Sunday in our new building a visitor said, "This church is going to collapse like a house of cards."?

Mark's gospel was written shortly after Rome destroyed Jerusalem. The people who first heard these words did not understand them as a prophecy. To them it was an explanation of why the Temple was destroyed. The disciples however were pushing for answers because the event had not yet happened. "What signs should we look for? When will it happen? Jesus told them not to be concerned with the forecasts of false Messiahs or date-setters.

Instead, he turned their attention to the ministry he had given them to do. He didn't want the disciples to get giddy about greatness. He didn't want them equating God's blessings with size and power. He was intent on teaching them that when God speaks, it is not in shouts but in whispers. He wanted them to realize that God doesn't get access to our lives by battering down the door to our hearts. God knocks. He wanted them to understand that their need was not fortune or fifteen minutes of fame, but having faith the size of a mustard seed. In the Temple

he pointed to the wealthy people dropping large sums of money in the Temple treasury, and then pointed to the poor widow whose faith led her to give her last two pennies. He wanted them to understand that the point of life is not to lean, but to lift.

Will someone please tell me why bigger is better? I'm not proud to admit it, but I spend a day at the Mall of America... 565 stores in a complex five stories high. British Airways has a non-stop flight from London to Minneapolis specifically for Mall of America shoppers. After seven hours in the Mall of America I felt like I had been mauled by American materialism.

Will someone please tell me why parents pick their children up from school in Hummers? Are the roads around here so bad that it takes an H1 to get to the grocery store? Can't Mishawaka make a more positive contribution to society?

Why do fast food franchises ask me to super-size my order? "You mean I can get 30% more fat and sugar for just forty cents more? What a deal!" I heard a dietician say that because we eat out so often we have grown accustomed to super-sized portions of food. Therefore we super-size our proportions at mealtime at home. After supper our super-sized children sit with their parents in front of big screen televisions in their super-sized houses. The lack of exercise and health problems associated with our sedentary lifestyle is contributing to super-sized medical bills.

Why did the terrorists select the targets they did on September 11, 2001? They struck huge buildings that are symbols of the things people in our society trust. They destroyed the Twin Towers, symbols of our trust in commerce. They struck the Pentagon, the symbol of our trust in military might. If they had succeeded, the Capital building may have been next, the symbol of our trust in political power.

In our passage from Mark, Jesus tells us that the things we think are great and permanent will one day be no more. Do you remember the closing scene from the first Planet of the Apes movie where Charlton Heston is walking down a beach? He

sees something that causes him to scream and fall on his knees. He thought that the planet inhabited by intelligent apes on which he landed was an alien world. What he sees on the shore is the upper portion of the Statue of Liberty! The human race had destroyed itself.

Things created by people are not permanent. One day, the great tidal wave of history will wipe everything away—everything except the word of God, which has been entrusted to us, and the way of life Jesus, taught us.

When I was a youth pastor at a Presbyterian church in Naperville, Illinois, I spend a lot of time with great kids, many from well-to-do families. They wanted for nothing. I remember a conversation I had with Robbie. Growing up, he got everything he requested, plus all sorts of things his parents thought he should have... like the new Mercedes Benz he got on his sixteenth birthday. At one time he had considered the ministry, but his parents discouraged it. How could he expect to maintain the lifestyle they had worked hard to provide for him on a pastor's salary? Robbie said, "My parents gave me all kinds of material things. But the thing I wanted most, and didn't get, was the thing that would have cost nothing." "What was that?" I asked. "To have them say, 'We love you, son.'"

One day an acquaintance of St. Francis saw him hoeing his garden. He stopped to talk and in the course of the conversation he asked Francis, "If you knew Christ was returning tomorrow, what would you do today?" Without looking up Francis replied, "I would be hoeing my garden."

We know not when our Lord may come, at night or noontide fair. We do know that until then we are to be involved with the biggest business of all-- God's business.