

Mark 13:1-8

This morning I am going to begin by talking about how we sweep things clean. Many of us today use a Swiffer. Either the type that uses cleaning liquid, or the type that just dusts, or we use a light, rechargeable, cordless vacuum cleaner. Some of us have a Roomba which travels all by itself from wall to wall vacuuming the floor, and then docks to recharge the battery. We've come a long way from the original vacuum cleaner, which actually began as an old pillowcase attached to a motor.

Before the vacuum cleaner there were only brooms. Brooms have had a long history, and many legends were born from them. Think of Harry Potter and the students flying through the sky on their brooms playing Quidditch. And we all know about the women who supposedly flew on their brooms. Brooms were used as a symbol in the marriage ceremony of slaves as they "jumped the broom", symbolizing a sweeping away of their old lives to begin a clean, new life together. The model with which we are most familiar, other than the artificial, synthetic model, was created by Benjamin Franklin who planted broom seeds he received from Hungary. Before that there were several versions of branches tied to a stick, the earliest dating back to the first cave-dwelling homo-sapiens. It seems we humans have been given an inbred desire to sweep things clean.

"Also, the individual straws that create brooms have long been used to help determine our personal future every time we agree to draw straws," according to Leonard Sweet, who was a professor at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, OH when I was a student there for a short time. He said, "The less we actually use brooms as cleaning implements (...) the more we seem to use them metaphorically." Rev. Sweet goes on to say, "Despite their simple structure and less-than-perfect cleaning performance, we all know what it means to make a clean sweep. Though it almost never happens, baseball pennant and world series teams dream of making a clean sweep. And who would argue that some of the most dangerous and necessarily perfect work done by soldiers and civilians alike is the tedious, nail-biting job of accomplishing a clean sweep of a minefield.

In these cases the simple act of sweeping brings about the absolute completion of a task; sweeping utterly eradicates all that stands in its way. It's this same type of utter eradication that Jesus predicted for the massive, seemingly indestructible walls of the great temple the structural center of Jewish life and faith," (ChristianGlobe Networks, Collected Sermons, by Leonard Sweet).

I may have told you, but when I visited Washington, D.C. the first time, I was so impressed by the gleaming white structures in our nation's capital. The disciples were just as impressed by the huge stones that constructed the buildings in Jerusalem, the city where they were located in today's gospel reading. Jesus and his disciples were at the Jewish temple where they spent much of their time the last week of Jesus' life when they made the comments about the huge stones. The temple was the only place where the Jewish priests presented their sacrifices to God.

Jesus was not impressed by the structure. In fact, he spoke of the destruction of the building. Not only is he speaking of the building's complete and total destruction, but he is speaking of the destruction of the sacrifice system that the priests had operated under for hundreds of years. It would be a clean sweep not only from the earth, but from the Jewish faith.

Jesus' words predicted the future as the temple was completely destroyed by the Roman soldiers in the year 70 AD. With the destruction of the temple came the destruction of the Jewish sacrifice system since sacrifices could only be held in the temple. Everything had changed. Yet, as Jesus foretold, this was not the end of time, it was just a clean sweep which opened a new practice of the faith not dependent on animal sacrifices. The change eliminated a set apart sect of priests who considered themselves more important than the common people. With the end of the earthly temple a new temple arose. It was Jesus. And as Jesus told his disciples, it was destroyed and rebuilt within three days.

Instead of being institutionally and legally based, it was based upon love. Instead of a list of laws, assurance came from the presence of the Holy Spirit. Instead of traveling to distant places to worship, Jesus is present when two or three are gathered. Instead of requiring repeated sacrifices, which the people had to buy each year, one sacrifice was made for all people, one that cannot be bought. The temple was so destroyed and the priestly system so in shambles there was no going back. So there was an ending of sorts, but it was just the beginning. It was just the birthing pains.

Many people have tried to predict when the end of time as we know it will happen, the time when Jesus will come down from the clouds in the same way as he ascended into heaven. A time when every knee will bow, and every tongue proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. The first recorded prediction of the end of this age was from a sect of Essene Jewish monks who predicted the Messiah would arrive between 66 and 70 A.D. Throughout history many people have claimed a special revelation from God as to when the world will end based on the dimensions of Noah's ark or the dimensions of the Great Pyramid of Giza, plagues, floods, fires, the alignment of the planets, comets, mathematical calculations, the end of a millennium, the day the sky turned dark due to forest fires and climatic conditions brought about predictions. In more modern times predictions were made based upon the threat of nuclear warfare, the end of the Mayan calendar, a predicted super-volcanic eruption, an asteroid hitting the earth, natural disasters..... As many people who claimed they knew the time for Christ to return, that many were wrong.

So here we are, in a holding pattern, waiting for the time to come. But it is not a time to sit inactive, just waiting. It is an active time of waiting. It is a time when we build our faith in Jesus. It is a time for us to lead others to Jesus. Penn Jillette, who is an agnostic whose name you may recognize from the magician duo Penn & Teller, asks, "How much do you have to hate someone to not proselytize?" In other words, why wouldn't you try to save someone from eternal death if you believe that there is eternal life in Christ?

It is our mission and our joy to celebrate the risen Christ; to look for miracles in our midst; to share with those who are on the fence, or do not believe. It is our time to invite people to worship with us so they can find for themselves the loving forgiveness found in God through Jesus Christ. We have a miracle in our midst, in this loving, caring group of Christians who nurture faith in one another and strive to bring people to Jesus. Oh, by the way, when I said last week that I wish I had a WWJD bracelet to keep me in line, another nurturing miracle came about... Denise, who makes jewelry, made me this wonderful, updated version of the WWJD bracelet, another example of how we nurture one another in faith.

Next week we are each to bring a person to worship with us as we celebrate the stewardship of people. Brenda and Rick have graciously offered to host a time of fellowship following worship next week. I invite all of you to plan to participate so people can get to know us as those who are actively awaiting the second coming of Christ without trying to predict when it is going to take place. This may become a time for us to grow our faith by planting seeds. Not broom seeds, as Benjamin Franklin did to produce a better broom, but seeds of faith. Not a time to sweep clean, but a time to share. All glory be to God.