

The 11th Hour of the 11th Day of the 11th Month

Thomas Robinson, *Armistice / Veterans Day*, November 11, 2018

Mark 13:6-8

¹ And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what huge stones and what amazing buildings!”

² And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There won’t be a stone here atop another stone that won’t be thrown down!”

³ And when he was sitting on the Mount of Olives across the valley from the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew began asking him in private, ⁴ “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be completed?”

⁵ But Jesus began talking to them: “Watch out that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come using my name, saying, ‘I’m the one!’ and they’ll lead many astray. ⁷ But when you hear wars and reports about wars, don’t be alarmed. It’s definitely going to happen, but it’s not yet the finish line.

⁸ For one people will be raised up against another people, and a kingdom against another kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines. These are a beginning of birth pains.

⁹ “But you watch yourselves. For they’ll hand you over to courts, and you’ll be beaten in synagogues, and you’ll stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰ And the Good News must first be announced to all nations!”

Revelation 12:7-9, 13-14;

⁷ Now a war broke out in the heaven; Michael and his angels making war against the serpent-dragon. The serpent-dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he didn’t prevail, nor was any place found for them any longer in the heaven. ⁹ And the giant serpent-dragon was thrown down, the ancient snake, who is called Accuser and the Satan, the one who deceives the whole inhabited world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

¹³ And when the serpent-dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who gave birth to the male child. ¹⁴ But to the woman were given the two wings of the giant eagle so that she might fly into the wilderness [Ex 19:4], to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, away from the presence of the snake.

2 Corinthians 11:23-30

²³ Are they servants of Christ? – I am talking like a I’m insane – I more. In many more labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often in situations threatening death. ²⁴ Five times I received by Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received stoning. I’ve been shipwrecked three times and was a night and a day adrift at sea. ²⁶ On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and lack of clothing. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of

my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? ³⁰ If it's necessary to celebrate, I'll celebrate the things that are part of my weakness.

The 11th Hour of the 11th Day of the 11th Month.

We arrive this morning at the hour when 100 years ago the guns fell silent at the end of the most destructive war the world had ever known: "the Great War" 1914-18.

Nearly 10 million dead or missing, 21.2 million wounded that 4 years earlier had been the pride and hope of their various nations. Armistice Day / Veterans Day.

We also are in a time of "peace" when there is a "mass shooting" on average about every day. Fires. Hurricanes. Floods. Global warming. We feel the trauma, the fragility of life, frustration at injustice, persistence of evil, the desire to know what really matters.

Jesus on the Mount of Olives looking at Herod's Temple.

The disciples impressed with magnificence. Jesus knows the impermanence. Beware of deception. It is hard to keep clarity in the welter of "great" events. Wars and rumors of wars. Rise and fall of peoples, kingdoms. Famines, earthquakes. Evil, struggle. Things that seem cataclysmic and final aren't. "Definitely going to happen..."

There is an end, a goal toward which God is moving, but it's in the hands of God, not humans.

The Great War to end all Wars.

End of an era. Destruction of empires: German/Prussian (Hohenzollerns, Wilhelm II, 300 yrs.), Russian (300), Austro-Hungarian (Hapsburgs 500), Ottoman (600). British (300) weaker. Self-determination and the rise of the nation-state as new focus of devotion and autonomy. Collapse of 19th cent. optimism about human progress. Trauma of war.

Troops enlisted on all sides in patriotic fervor. High hopes of quick fight, military glory. Instead, miserable trench warfare. Verdun (1916, 163,000 killed), Somme (1 mil. cas.), Passchendaele. Vast casualties for little gain. Human folly. Hell of war. Machine guns, mustard gas, tanks — mechanized carnage. 60% casualties. Americans entered in late 1917. A last German gamble, Spring 1918, fell short. No replacements. Total exhaustion.

Nov. 11 at 5 am, armistice signed. At 11 am the guns stopped. Soldiers died till 10:59. Exhilaration but not wisdom. A vindictive rather than a healing peace, began the slide toward another war. Power of totalitarianism. Control of information. The big lie.

Something else also hit. Spanish flu pandemic. During 1918-19, more than 50 million died world-wide. 33,000 died in New York City! Far more than war. Human & natural death! It seemed the end of everything. The edge of the abyss. But today we hardly remember it.

"Everything has Changed" "Nothing Changes"

Some things have changed. Our false sense of invulnerability. But the human condition continues. We still see the human events as the great events. We see God's story as personal belief. Tolerated and maybe useful, but not fundamentally important. We know the self-sacrifice of crisis but are ever ready to revert to selfish individualism.

God's story and Kingdom are the great event: Good News that the world's Creator acts to woo us to his love. His long process of claiming his creation. Now by grace calling people to faith. One day by creative power. The challenge is to see now the reality of what God is doing. We experience day by day struggle, trauma, and joy, now as a part of God's greater drama.