**Mark 13:1-8**

**As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” 2Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”**

**3When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” 5Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. 6Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. 7When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birthpangs.**

**Hebrews 10:11-25 (11-14 & 19-25)**

**11And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. 12But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” 13and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” 14For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. 15And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, 16“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,” 17he also adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” 18Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.**

**19Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, 20by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), 21and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. 24And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

**Destruction and re-build.**

**In Christianity, we have a very strong belief in death and resurrection. To put it strongly: destruction and re-birth. Jesus spoke of himself – destroy this temple – and in three days it would be re-built. In other philosophies there are such thoughts as the Phoenix rising from the ashes. In history we have the Napier earthquake with its inner city destroyed but now the art deco re-building is a tourist attraction. And of course the hope which is being held of the possibilities for the Christchurch re-build which is in process.**

**Jesus looked across at the temple and he prophesied its destruction. Not one stone would be left upon another. When privately asked about when this would happen by Peter, James and John, Jesus answered cryptically indicating that it was the beginning of the End Times.**

**The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote after the death and resurrection of Jesus, but before the temple’s destruction in 70 AD. The writer developed their argument as the young church worked out how it understood its life and faith. The temple system with its continual sacrificing of animals for the forgiveness of sins was not necessary because of the once and for all offering of Christ the spotless lamb – the perfect sacrifice. The ministry of the priests in making the offerings over and over again as intermediaries between the people and God was no longer needed, because through the death of Christ the curtain in the temple was ripped in two the dividing wall was broken down – all people have access to the love and grace of God through Jesus.**

**Where once people were governed by a law which was external to them, given to them through their religious system, now the law of God would be placed on their hearts and in their minds. There would be internal direction and motivation because the Holy Spirit had been given. Now the Holy Spirit living in every believer guides us and motivates us.**

**Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, a new and living way has been made. The context is also of end times: the phrase “as you see the day approaching” is a reference to the return of Christ.**

**We’re going to do two things with our time here today. One is to reflect on the process of destruction and re-birth in our lives and then to look at the points which the writer of Hebrews makes as to the way we should live as we see the day of Christ approaching.**

**(Slow)**

**Firstly are we able to identify in our lives things which are being destroyed, broken down, or dismantled? It might be: an unhelpful habit, a dependant relationship, a sin we so easily fall into, or a pattern of behaviour. It might be a way of faulty thinking expressing itself in negativity or prejudice? It might be a reliance on something we have always had?**

**Being broken is a really tough and painful thing, and we tend to resist at all costs the depth of pain which letting go of the past in order to step into the future might hold. Breaking involves, pain and grief. We can unconsciously hold to the belief that “better the devil we know than the devil we do not”. And so we stay with what we know and resist positive change.**

**However, if the Holy Spirit is to transform our lives, then the old must be dismantled. Breaking with the past can feel like a wrecking-ball is pounding against our stubborn ways. Just like in those reno programmes on TV, a renovation sometimes begins with a sledge-hammer.**

**But, ‘its not by might nor by power, but by my spirit says the Lord, this mountain will be removed’. Our job is to surrender ourselves to God’s good work in our lives.**

**The second part of today is to identify the work of God in our lives, what sort of transformation is talked of in Hebrews 10; how then shall we live?**

**The first is, 22let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. I hope you like lettuce because there are three “let use’s” in a row here.**

**Because Christ opened the way for us, we are urged to confidently approach God. There is no need for a fear which would prevent us from coming to God. We need not have the guilts about our sin, because our consciences have been have been sprinkled clean. God wants us every day, at all times to come to him. God wants us to live openly and freely in relationship with him. When we fall, we bring it to him, when we run strongly we rejoice in him. Neither failure nor success are to hold us from approaching the throne of grace.**

**The second ‘let us’ to chew on – 23’Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.’  One of the main purposes of the book of Hebrews is to call people – in difficult times – to persevere in the faith. It might seem at times as though faith is too hard, or as though our expectations of God are not met, or its just easiest to go with the flow and fit in with everyone around us. But no! We are to hold fast to our faith. Not looking to the left or the right, but focussed on the one who is faithful. Remember God’s promise - my word that goes out from my mouth:
    it will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
    and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
12You will go out in joy
    and be led forth in peace; (Isaiah 55)**

**God is faithful to deliver on His promises.**

**Third ‘let us’: 24And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

**In the book of Romans Paul taught that the law written on our hearts was the law of love – ‘Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law’ (13:8). And so we are to consider how we are to provoke – stir one another up to love and good works. The people who were being written to in the book of Hebrews were encountering persecution, based upon bigotry and ignorance. People did not want to accept the new and living way. The old and established was to be stuck to for the stability of society. Were they to win others over to the faith by argument? No: they were to be known by their love and good works.**

**And so when we are tempted to return evil for evil and to take and eye for an eye, it is the gathered community which holds us to what faithful behaviour looks like. We are to bless those who curse us and pray for those who persecute. We are not to repay evil with evil we are to repay evil with good. It is the community working at its best which provokes this work of the Spirit in us. This counter-intuitive behaviour, when all our emotions tell us to strike back.**

**And even more as we see the day approaching. Talk of end times scares some people, but we’ve been in the end times for 2000 years. The purpose of Scripture is not to reduce us to fear, but to encourage us on to faithful action and to let God work God’s good purposes out.**

**Firstly to what is being broken down in our lives.**

**Maybe, at the moment there is nothing you identify in terms of destruction and re-build. That’s ok – give thanks.**

**Now though we’re going to pause and commit to the lord the things we might be in the present struggling with and then we’ll look to the transformation which God is making in our lives.**

**Prayer….**

**Loving God: we trust that you are good and that you are involved in our lives to transform us and make us new. Holy Spirit have your way. Even though the pain, of being broken is so hard to bear, we surrender to your purposes. Shape us, mould us, into your image. Please help us to leave behind those things which are not of you. We don’t like the past habits and patterns being destroyed, they are all we know, but help us to trust that you do give beauty for ashes and the oil of joy for mourning.**

**And Lord, help us to persevere with faith in you. Help us to moment by moment approach you without fear or guilt. Help us to press on with love and good works, help us to spur one another on and be encouragers together. Come, Lord Jesus come.**

**Affirmation Jeremiah 31:28 New Living Translation (NLT)**

**28In the past I deliberately uprooted and tore down this nation. I overthrew it, destroyed it, and brought disaster upon it. But in the future I will just as deliberately plant it and build it up. I, the Lord, have spoken!**