

### **What's Your City Built On?** (Mark 13:1-8)

There is an FM radio station in our area called "The Drive." The station plays music from the generation that raised and nurtured me – the sixties. The Drive is a popular station among people of my age and disposition because they recognize that the music they play is "the sound track" of our lives. I do believe that the music of that counter-culture movement that began in San Francisco in the summer of 1967 – the Summer of Love – is the sound track of my life.

My generation, the so-called "Now Generation" changed the way we view the world. As much as some people disagree, my generation gave the nation a new social conscience. For the first time, it was alright to challenge authority. I am always quick to acknowledge, regretfully, that my generation also legitimized the use of psychedelic drugs that spawned new generations of abuse.

Although I have left behind much of that former "hippie" philosophy, I have retained some of the values that grew out of my experience of the sixties.

Whether we like to admit it or not, society has inherited some important values from "my generation." The sixties taught me what God means by the command to love each other more than ourselves – to sacrifice ourselves for the love of strangers and enemies. It's true that I learned that lesson in Sunday school but I experienced it in the sixties. And I'm not talking about the so-called "free love" or "sexual

freedom." I saw God's command lived out by those who protested the war in Vietnam and those who fought that same war.

Some of my bedrock beliefs – those core values – that have served me well all these years came out of my experience of the sixties. Later, in the eighties I understood why some of those core values endured all these many years. My generation didn't just change the world. We built a city. Not a city of concrete and steel, but a city of heart and soul – and the heart and soul of the city was music. Please pray with me.

And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O God, the true builder of one Great City. Open our hearts and minds to the scripture read and the word proclaimed that we too might build great cities on the bedrock values of Christ Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

The Drive radio station would agree that my generation built a city on rock and roll – the sound track of our lives. What does a city built on rock and roll look like? Perhaps a better question is what does it sound like? Virtually all the events – real and mythical – that shaped and informed my generation are chronicled in the music of the period.

The ethos of my generation has been meticulously documented by poet-

singers like Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Paul Simon, and many others. It was summed up very well twenty years later by a popular band from the sixties in a song titled: *We Built this City on Rock and Roll*. It's a city built with words, built to endure over time. So, what's your city built on?

My generation isn't unique. Every generation has built its own city according to the way life was defined by the times. From the poverty of the twenties and thirties, to the patriotism and pride of the forties and fifties to the prosperity of the sixties and seventies as the world recovered from decades of war; generations have always built metaphorical cities.

In the eighties and nineties some built cities on the excesses of new-found wealth spawned by big government and even bigger dreams, by generations that produced information rather than goods. And what about the generations to come in the new millennium, what will their cities look like, sound like, feel like? This generation has been born into a world that is fragmented, confused by too much information, an electronic world that moves so fast it seems to be a blur – without clarity.

So how does this idea of generational "cities" intersect with the word of God today? In our gospel lesson this morning Jesus is coming out of the temple. Remember, from last week he has been teaching the disciples about stewardship – the giving of our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and our witness.

As they step outside, one of the disciples says to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus says, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all

will be thrown down." What Jesus is really saying to the disciples is, "This is a city built with stones – bricks and mortar. It will not endure the test of time." In another sense, Jesus is posing the question, "What's your city built on?"

These words spoken by Jesus are nothing more – or less – than a prophetic oracle, a prophecy of what will come if things don't change. We know that his oracle did come to pass forty years or so later when the Roman Empire destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD. To the disciples, this prophecy must have been difficult to imagine as they stood there in the bright sunlight gazing upon these massive structures envisioned by David, and built by Solomon and successor generations over many years.

With our benefit of hindsight, it's just too easy for us to forget that these prophetic words of judgment surely were unbelievable at the time. The large blocks of stone that make up the lower part of the West Wall in the old city even today provide visual evidence of the magnificent architecture that inspired the original expressions of awe by the disciples. If you have ever visited Jerusalem you have experienced their awe first hand. One can feel dwarfed walking beneath the old city walls of cold brown stone.

But in pronouncing this oracle of destruction to the disciples, Jesus is looking beyond the outward appearance of these awesome structures that make up the temple. He looks to reality – no matter how secure buildings or even institutions may appear to be, they can all be overthrown. So what the city is built on matters! Anything built with human hands – inspired by human minds – can be destroyed by those same hands and minds. It's important

for us to revisit that question, “What’s your city built on?” from time to time.

Generational cities built by the youth of any period are, of course, only romantic metaphors for the way we experience the world and the way we express that world to the generations that have preceded us and to the generations that will go on beyond us.

These generational cities speak volumes about us – about our values and our priorities. To put what Jesus was saying to the disciples into perspective as they stood in awe outside the temple we need only look back only eight years – to September 11, 2001. Even as we watched the televised images in real time, most of us could not believe those awesome twin towers would fall. That which is made by human hands can be destroyed by human hands. What’s your city built on?

Imagine Jesus stepping out on to the plaza between the twin towers of the World Trade Center. One of the disciples says, “Look Teacher, what a magnificent work are these monuments of steel and glass.” And Jesus would say, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one beam or pane of glass will be left, all will be thrown down.” September 11<sup>th</sup> bears witness to the gospel message and Jesus’ prophetic oracle transported two thousand years into the future. We are reminded to invest in that which is built by God – not that which is made with human hands. “What’s your city built on?”

No building, no institution, no government, no city can endure for eternity. Only the city built on God. That which has been created by God will survive until the end of time – The City of God. What’s your city built on? Not a city built on patriotism or national pride; not a city built on rock and roll; not

a city built on excess and extravagance; not a virtual city built on electrons moving at the speed of light; not a city that exists in cyber space. None of these human-made cities will survive. What’s your city built on?

As Christians, we are called to slice through the metaphors of the human city, those that are or would be built on our individual vanity. St. Augustine drew this contrast in his famous work: *The City of God*. The City of Man will suffer decline, but the City of God will endure forever. This is the prophetic word in Mark’s gospel that we hear today. Jesus is calling us – even warning us this day to build our city on God.

Consider this when you contemplate building your city. With all of our technological advances – which are no less a gift from God – we have more power as humans than ever before. For the first time in the history of the world we have the capability to destroy ourselves and all that God has created and set before us. Think about that for just a moment. We have the capability to destroy everything God has labored throughout history to create especially for us.

With this in mind, is it any wonder that our buildings, our institutions, our governments, our cities are temporary at best. We can destroy everything we have built and all that God has created. Nothing in our world is for certain except for one thing. What is that one thing? Anyone care to venture a guess? The one thing that is for certain and enduring is the Gospel message. John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that God gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This is the good news of the gospel.

No matter what happens, today, tomorrow, in the distant future, God loves us. God's love makes the best bricks for building our cities. God's love endures all hardships and disasters. God's love is color blind. It knows no limits, either human or divine. God's love always seeks justice. It is the only true and solid foundation to build on. So, what's your city built on?