**25th Pentecost, Nov. 15, 2015, 1 Sam 1:4-20 and 2:2-20; Heb 20:11-25; Mark 13:1-8; Rev Mary Trainor**

We don't have a Starbucks here in Shawano, but there are plenty of them in Appleton and Green Bay. If you have gone to Starbucks, you probably remember that they change their cups at holiday time every year -- they are decorated red cups. Just last week, they released their new cups -- and the cups are just plain red with no writing or decorations: there are no Merry Christmas words or icons. This has caused an outrage among some Christians on the Internet, who wish to have the Company keep Christ in Christmas. It has been very interesting watching the interchange on Facebook and in the news about this issue of the plain red cup. It is wonderful that so much energy is going into trying to keep Christ in Christmas. Thanksgiving is coming in 11 days, and Christmas a month after. It is a time of year when we stop and allow ourselves to overflow with gratitude for our blessings, especially the blessing that Christ Jesus came to earth to save us. Yet our faith is much more permanent than a paper cup Those red cups are discarded after the beverage has been consumed, and our faith is eternal. Those red cups do not need to say anything, for our faith is etched permanently on our hearts and doesn't need to be written on a paper cup; we are sealed as Christ's own forever in Baptism. So yes, many people do buy and hold those red cups -- but we are to set our sights higher than changing cups -- we are to "**change the world, one person at a time**." (Rev. Emily C. Heath's blog, Huffington Post, Nov. 9, 2015).

Today's reading from Hebrews eloquently expresses our mission in life as Christians--our purpose, and it is an all consuming vocation of the highest importance, given to every one of us here. "...***let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean...hold fast to...hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds***." We gather here in this holy place to be filled with God's love, grace, and forgiveness. We gather here in this historic place to provoke one another to love and good deeds. We are given a new beginning, with hearts sprinkled clean. We are able to leave here each Sunday with confidence, full assurance of faith, to go out and do what we were made for: to change the world for Christ, one person at a time.

This "one person at a time" is not easy, however, because there are many distractions and attractions that lure people with temporary sources of satisfaction and enjoyment. This causes us to get discouraged from even approaching others about their faith. We want a red cup to do the work for us instead...it is too difficult. Yet the Bible tells us to approach others in Christ's Name with "confidence." We gain this confidence from outside of ourselves, from the Holy Spirit -- it comes if we ask!

People put their hope in these sources of satisfaction and enjoyment: material possessions, hobbies, drugs, etc. We all get this -- if we only have this particular car or house or job or vacation or sports equipment, we will be happy and our life will be complete. And, we know from experience that when we finally do get what we have been yearning for for a long time, our satisfaction is short lived. Some other thing is then sought; more and more. These things are temporary;God is permanent.

In our Gospel today, we see the result of putting hope into material things. The Gospel is about the enormous and beautiful temple building in Jerusalem, which was THE faith of the people there for thousands of years. The temple, newly reconstructed at great expense by Herod the Great, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The walls were composed of great white stones 40 feet long, lavishly decorated with silver and gold. The temple complex was so huge that it could be seen by pilgrims from many miles away. The temple was the symbol of God's presence in Israel; it was THE focal point of their lives, their anchor, their compass, their source of identification and strength. Jesus warned the disciples, "***Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down***." And indeed, thirty eight years later this enormous temple was "***thrown down***" in 70 AD by the Roman Army. All those stones and buildings of the Temple were destroyed, and the people in it were slaughtered. Yet, the day before all that happened people were going about their merry way thinking everything was fine, and they were clinging to the permanence of the Temple.

We remember the words that were said about the Titanic before it sailed on its maiden voyage in 1916. The Titanic was equipped with eight watertight compartments on the hull that would close if water entered them, allowing the ship to remain afloat. The captain said, "I cannot imagine any condition which would cause the ship to founder. Modern shipbuilding has gone beyond that." And a crewmember said, "God himself could not sink this ship." The Titanic was built with human hands, and it sunk; the Temple was put up by human hands, and was destroyed.

Jesus says later in this chapter of Mark (v.31), "***Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away***." God and His Word provide the only stability in our unstable world.

What is your faith built upon? Not a coffee cup, not something made by human hands. The saving love of Jesus is etched on your heart....this is not disposable, this is not fragile; not subject to destruction like the walls of the temple or the Titanic: this is good news, this is eternal.

Let us end with the words to the 19th Century Hymn "My hope is built;" they capture God's message for us today: **1. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. Refrain: On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand. 2. When Darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil. (Refrain) 3. His oath, his covenant, his blood supports me in the whelming flood. When all around my soul gives way, he then is all my hope and stay. (Refrain)**

**Amen.**