

## Thursday, November 21

Read Mark 13:1-8. Jesus spoke about the stones of the Jerusalem Temple being thrown down and that not one stone will be left upon another. That must have been a shock to the disciples and in fact, very difficult to believe. But in the end, the church or the Temple is not what really counts. That is true when thinking about the difference priorities of religion and relationships.

Religion is about all the rules humans have created, whereas God intended for us to be in relationship with him. That is what really counts. Think about Central United Methodist Church. What would happen if our big, beautiful building were destroyed? Would Central Church still exist? Would we go forward or would we experience “analysis paralysis” and find it difficult to go into the future with any degree of confidence? Think about our Central Church family and what our true strengths are. Do you believe that our church would continue to exist? Meditate on these concepts and write our response here.

## Friday, November 22

Read once more Mark 13:1-8. Has this passage grown on you? Can you see it as a positive scripture and one that shows the confidence of Jesus the Christ? Pastor Jack asked, “Can we provide a stable and healthy community of faith? A congregation that reflects Jesus, loves people, and engages in sacrificial service?” Do you have the confidence that our church is already loving others, serving sacrificially and reflecting Jesus I the world?

Pastor Jack also challenged us to engage in a three month conversation beginning this next January. We would have three meetings after church in a restaurant (Dutch Treat) and discuss the material from the book, *The Great Dechurching*. Would you be interested in those conversations to help Pastor Jack and our leaders to move forward in bringing the *dechurched* back into our care and relationship? Write your ideas here and contact Pastor Jack to tell him about your interest in joining him in conversation.

## Message Notes – November 17, 2024

### *Disconnected? Disillusioned? Dechurched?\**

- I. Two pastors of a large church in Orlando, Florida worked with a political science professor to address what they call The Great \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. The fact is that \_\_\_\_ million members have left the church in the last \_\_\_\_ years.
  - B. They write, “More people have left the church in the last 25 years than all the new people who became Christians from the \_\_\_\_\_ Great Awakening, \_\_\_\_\_ Great Awakening and \_\_\_\_\_ crusades combined.”
    1. The trend has impacted \_\_\_\_\_ congregation, hitting \_\_\_\_\_ age category, from evangelicals to Catholics to mainline Protestants.
    2. The median congregation in the United States now has \_\_\_\_ people, down from \_\_\_\_\_ two decades ago.
    3. About \_\_\_\_% of Americans are “dechurched.”
- II. A couple thoughts and a \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. There is always \_\_\_\_\_.
  - B. I was \_\_\_\_\_ when I entered full-time ministry. That meant two things.
    1. First, I initially had no \_\_\_\_ outside the church.
    2. I had to learn to work \_\_\_\_\_, not work \_\_\_\_\_.
  - C. Here is the disclaimer: No matter what \_\_\_\_\_ you are hoping to return to in the history of the church – our church – it will never be that \_\_\_\_\_ again!
  - D. There is one way to go... and that’s into the \_\_\_\_\_.
- III. There is further good news in that the \_\_\_\_\_ or in \_\_\_\_\_.

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\*Mark 13:1-8

the case of our scripture lesson for today, the \_\_\_\_\_, has been at a similar point in its history.

A. You might say that these people were \_\_\_\_\_.

1. But unlike today, their change in religious activity was \_\_\_\_\_ upon them.
2. Many \_\_\_\_\_ and upsetting events were going to come, and their lives would be threatened.

B. But Jesus ended on a \_\_\_\_\_ note, saying, “This is but the beginning of the \_\_\_\_\_ pangs”

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ faith was completely reshaped by the destruction of the temple, forcing Jews to shift to worship in synagogues led by rabbis.
2. Christianity also became more \_\_\_\_\_-focused.

IV. So, what is going on in the \_\_\_\_\_ church?

A. The reasons for dechurching may vary, but the losses are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

B. The bottom line is this: The church is not a \_\_\_\_\_, constructed of large stones that can be thrown down.

C. Once again, the church is **not** about \_\_\_\_\_, it’s about \_\_\_\_\_.

1. Such a church will be made up of a group of Christians who develop \_\_\_\_\_ and really \_\_\_\_\_ for people, particularly those who are suffering and in tremendous pain.
2. Can we provide a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ community of faith?
3. A congregation that \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus, \_\_\_\_\_ people, and engages in sacrificial \_\_\_\_\_?

## *Daily Devotional Guide*

The following is a daily devotional and study guide meant to enhance your understanding of the message and grow as a Christian.

It is offered for your personal reflection or to share with others.

## **Monday, November 18**

With so many people in America “dechurching,” you most likely know someone who has left the church. Perhaps you, yourself, have left the church in the past. In your experience what do you believe are the most prevalent reasons for people leaving the church? Write your thoughts here and pray for anyone that you know right now who has walked away from the church.

## **Tuesday, November 19**

Pastor Jack shared some startling statistics about “The Great Dechurching.” Some 40 Million people have left the church over the past 25 years. 15% of Americans are Dechurched. The Median size of congregation in the United States has declined from 137 to 65. Are these statistics, in fact, startling to you? Having seen what has happened in our own church and in other churches around us, what have you heard about the decline in church attendance and involvement? Write in a few words what you would like to see as the future of Central UMC. Pray for God’s presence and wisdom as we seek to be the church God created us to be.

## **Wednesday, November 20**

Read Mark 13:1-8. As Jesus shared the prophecy that Jerusalem Temple would one day be destroyed, the disciples were most likely shocked and saddened. But Jesus mentioned that the destruction of the Temple and the violence of the Roman Empire upon the Jews were all part of birth pangs. There will be wars and earthquakes and famines but Jesus said there were but birth pangs! Do you find Jesus’ words disturbing or comforting? When you read Jesus’ words are you hesitant to believe him? Perhaps what Jesus is expressing is that when you’ve hit the bottom, there is no other way but up! Meditate on these thoughts and write your reflections here.