

## **Welcome & Opening Prayer**

Gracious, Life-Giving God, you are always creating something new among us, but often we are so impressed with what we have built we have a hard time letting go. Show us O God, what blinds our eyes, and open our hearts and lives to the new thing you are creating among us through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

## **Brief Introduction to the study/what to expect/Dwelling in the Word**

**Karen, share screen with scripture text please**

### **Dwelling in the Word: Mark 11:15-17, 27-33, 13:1-2**

Then [Jesus and his disciples] came to Jerusalem. And [Jesus] entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?" Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me." They argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'Of human origin'?" — they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

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

**Karen, after reading the first time, wait about a minute, then display the questions on screen please**

## Reading the first time:

- *What words or phrases stand out for you?*
- *What surprises you? What things are you hearing for the first time in this text as we read?*

**Karen, as we read the second time, share screen with scripture text (above) please**

## Going Deeper: Reading the second time

**Karen, after reading the second time, wait about a minute, then display only the first question on screen please. I will lead the rest of the questions verbally.**

- *Do you hear anything different? What stands out for you as you hear the second time?*
- *The temple was the centre of the religious faith and cultural tradition of the time. How do you think the disciples feel hearing Jesus' harsh words, "Not a stone will be left on stone?"*
- *How central has our own church building (or perhaps the church you were baptized, married, confirmed, etc.) in been to your own faith life?*
- *While the building has remained standing, we have already experienced what it is like to be removed from our building and centre of our worship and faith life during the time of COVID 19. What has this been like? What kinds of feelings did you feel? How has this time outside the church building affected your faith?*

## SESSION ONE // Creating Something New

In this first session, we hear Rachel Held Evans, talk about the death of the church. Think about your internal reactions to this idea as you hear her reflections.

**Karen, please screen share and play the video**

Watch the film Creating Something New with Rachel Held Evans

**A. What are your initial reactions to this video?**

## Going Deeper

In the video, Evans talks about numbers, demographics, and the death of the church.

***A. Have you noticed the things she talks about? How do you think we measure the “success” of a church? Do you worry about the future of the church as it is?***

In this video we frequently hear the word “Empire,” and Evans connects the church to Empires and Empire-building.

***A. Empire is not a word we may regularly use. How do you understand the word “Empire.” What might Empire-building be about?***

***B. As we think about the history of the church in what ways can you specifically link the church with Empire? As you consider these ways, do you think these things are in keeping with God’s mission and ministry to bring life to the world? Why or why not?***

***C. Thinking very specifically about our Canadian context, what has been the outcome of the church as an Empire-building institution?***

In this video Evans suggests that dying to old ways is exactly needs to happen in the church; that a little death and resurrection is exactly what we need.

***A. Can you think of some things in the church that have already died in your lifetime? Do these seem like good deaths or bad deaths. Explain.***

***B. Our time in COVID, in some ways has seemed like a dying time. What kinds of traditions, ways of being in the church and in our congregation seem to be dying or losing their importance in this time? How difficult are these deaths?***

Evans ends the video with a very beautiful statement. That gardeners do not worry about death. That resurrection people do not worry about death.

***A. What is the simple yet very meaningful truth Evans makes with this statement? Is it that death does not matter or has no relevance in our lives and world? What do you think she means?***

***B. What are some of the new things that God has been growing among us in this time of COVID? In this time when we have been outside our church buildings?***

***C. As we think about the focus of this study, “Called to Community,” and the death of the church as Evans speaks of it—how might these two themes be connected? How might resurrection and God’s creation of something new, be located in this call of the church outside of church buildings and into our communities and neighbourhoods?***

## **Closing Thoughts/Comments**

**Closing Prayer:** Gracious God, we are your people, the church. We are not all we should be. Still, you call us. You resurrect us, and you grow us into something brand new. Transform us. Make us gardeners of your grace and life in the world. Call us deeper into community where you nurture the whole of the earth and its people to life and love in you; through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen.