



Not One Stone Will Be Left Upon Another

A sermon by the Rev. Susan Bek

Proper 24, Year C, Luke 21: 5-19

The Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost, November 17, 2019

In today's lesson, the Gospel writer has Jesus standing with his disciples as they look upon the temple and admire it. The temple has been through a lot. It was built, destroyed, rebuilt, defiled, purified and, at this point stood in glorious splendor. Now Jesus was standing with them; the messiah had come. They must have had great expectations. I'm sure they expected that the coming of the messiah would ring in a new age and that things would finally be looking up.

Jesus turns and speaks to them, and what does he say? Was it something that supported their new-found sense of optimism? No. Jesus looks out mournfully and says about the temple, "not one stone will be left upon another. All will be thrown down" He foretells of the destruction of the temple (which would come to pass in about forty years). Can you imagine how the disciples felt upon hearing this news? They probably said something like, "Oh no. Not again!"

Last Thursday, on my way to work, I heard a news story that brought those same words out of my mouth, "Oh no, not again!" This time it was Saugus High School; a place that means a lot to me and my family. We used to live a couple blocks up the hill from there. My mother in law lived directly across the street. My sister-in-law worked in the office there. My brother in law was a deputy sheriff, often at the school. Their children attended school there. We drove past this place almost every day of the 22 years that we lived there. The news hit me so hard it surprised me. It was just too close to home – literally in the neighborhood where we raised our kids. Oh no, not again!

For the biblical chosen people of God, it was not an easy journey, and it's not an easy journey for us either. The world is corrupt, broken, having turned away from most of what God intends for us. While the delights of the world distracted us, the darkness of the world settled in.

Day after day they prayed for an end to their suffering, for a messiah who would overthrow their enemies and make it clear whose side God was on. This beautiful temple was, as so many things in our lives are...temporary.

Those were difficult times, and these are difficult times. Time and again our hearts have been turned inside out as we hear of another tragedy, devastating fire or senseless act of violence. Things in our lives are temporary too.

Even our bodies are temporary. As we grow older, things don't work as well anymore. It gets harder to see, harder to hear, and we have to push ourselves to do the things that used to be so easy. Illness comes, loved ones die, things change.

Look around at our beautiful sanctuary, our lives, and our world. This gospel lesson reminds us that all that seems so permanent, all that we count on, everything in this world around us is temporary. Not one stone will be left upon another. Nothing worldly lasts. All sense of permanence is an illusion. It will all eventually end.

It's not a very uplifting message is it?

This lesson seems to get worse before it gets better. The disciples ask when it will happen and what will be the sign that it is about to take place. Jesus gives a long list of terrible things that will happen first—people will come and try to mislead you. Wars and insurrections will break out. Nation will rise against nation; there will be great earthquakes, famines, and plagues. The only consolation Jesus offers is this simple statement, “Do not be terrified.”

Next Jesus tells the disciples that before all this occurs, they will be arrested and persecuted, and brought before kings and governors. About that he says, “this will give you an opportunity to testify.”

The next part is key. Jesus tells them not to prepare a defense in advance. Why? Because “I will give you words of wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict” This is important. Jesus is promising to stand with them in these challenges. He promises that they will not be forsaken, they will not stand alone.

They will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and some of them would be put to death. Jesus says, “Even though you die, ‘not one hair on your head will perish.’ By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Jesus is telling them that there is something more; something beyond our worldly existence. There's something worth living for, something worth dying for. There is something worth hoping for, but even more important than that, there's something worth working for.

There's a better way, and we are called to help usher it in. There's a better way of life and we are called to be living examples of it.

Last Thursday it felt to me like the foundation of our safe little neighborhood had been destroyed and not one stone was left upon another. Together we all cried, "oh no! not again!"

It was not an easy journey. It wasn't for the disciples, and it is not going to be for us either. Being Christian, being a good person, being faithful, does not buy you a carefree life. Life is challenging for everyone.

But take heart. Do not be discouraged. Do not be misled. Do not be terrified.

Take action. Do your part to help make this world a safer, more loving, more compassionate place.

And know that you are never alone. God is now and will always be right beside you.

Have faith and hold on to hope knowing that, in the end, things will get better.

There are two things that will never pass away. They are, God's love for us, and God's presence with us.

And just in case any of you are still worried, still afraid, I would suggest taking some advice from Dale Carnegie who said, "Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit at home and think about it. Go out and get busy."

Our job is to make the world a safer place by shining the light of Christ everywhere we go.

Let's come in here, light our candles, say our prayers, lift our voices, receive the bread and wine made holy, and then let's go out and get busy!

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.