

Sermon – Luke 21:5-19; 2 Thessalonians 3;6-13  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
23 Pentecost – Year C  
13 November 2022

“Unwearied Witness”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Things have been falling apart since the beginning, but somehow it always seems worse now than it did in the past. Take these words from a keen observer of current events: “We have seen much of these signs, even though they also happened previously; but they are not for that reason any less sure of signs, especially because they occur at the same time as the others. And everyone acknowledges that today’s wars are of such a character as to make former wars appear as mere child’s play – so very horrible and devastating is what comes with guns, armor and munitions. . . . Let these signs be signs, great signs, signifying great things.” The speaker of these words? None other than our own Dr. Martin Luther, whose 539<sup>th</sup> birthday was this past Thursday, who was convinced by the greatness and the horror of the events around him that the end of the world was imminent. And yet here we are, in a world that has survived long enough to name churches and denominations after the good doctor.
2. To be fair, things do usually seem worse than they once did. Jesus’ words from today’s gospel reading could be ripped from the headlines of the *Times* or the *Tribune*. Wars and insurrections, earthquakes, famines, and plagues. From the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol to the war that continues to rage in Ukraine; from famines caused by war and climate change to natural disasters to the reminder from COVID that we have not fully mastered virulent

- diseases, we know that things are bad. Maybe it seems like the world is ending. Certainly, we are reminded that this creation is entropic, always falling apart. What are we to do?
3. Jesus' words are spoken in the shadow of the Jerusalem Temple, two days after his triumphal entry into the city. For some of the provincial fishermen with him, it might have been their first time seeing the grand structure, impressive in two ways. First, having been rebuilt after the exile, King Herod had undertaken huge, and hugely impressive, renovations of the Temple. The place was an architectural marvel. Even more, however, was the fact that this was the mailing address for the Lord of heaven and earth; that of all the other places God might also be, this was where God promised to be. No wonder they mumbled in wonder, mouths agape. And Jesus responds by saying that not one of those stones would be left upon another? And then the bit about wars and all that? Of course, Jesus was right. Twice, in fact. First, by the time Luke wrote these words, the Temple had been thrown down. The Romans razed it in response to rebellion. But in Christ, the Temple was no longer the place God was most truly present. Jesus is the new Temple, and just a few days hence we will be torn down, laid to waste. But that would not be the end.
  4. Jesus points to death to show us from where new life will emerge. Jesus speaks of destruction to make way for the new creation that will emerge. In Christ, the Temple that was cast down has been rebuilt. The grave is now the gate to eternal life. And while we destroy, while we witness and suffer destruction, God's Kingdom is taking shape. No, nothing we build will last forever. That, finally, is good news. Beyond both the broken, sinfulness of this world and its great truth and beauty is something more. As the preacher Fred Craddock writes, "there is no area of God's creation so remote as to be unaffected by God fulfillment of the divine intention." Christ will be raised on

the third day, a new Temple built back up, whose divine presence permeates the cosmos. One day, a new heaven and a new earth shall emerge. Alleluia!

5. The question, then, I suppose, is: What now? Living in a world that will fall apart no matter what we do, waiting for a new day that will come but whose arrival we cannot hasten, what now? What are we to do? Well, Jesus points the way. While suffering is not to be sought for its own sake, neither is it to be shunned. Every moment, no matter how difficult, is an opportunity to testify, to witness. Which is to say, to point to Christ. How will this world know its hope if we keep quiet? In the face even of death, we do not despair. We point to Christ, the new Temple, who is our home. We point to Christ, telling others of God's great love for them.
6. Paul, too, points the way. Paul also thought the world was ending, but far from encouraging people to take it easy or to look out only for themselves, he writes that we should not idle; that we should "not be weary in doing what is right." To be sure, this happens in big ways. In the face of war, we work for peace. In a world of hunger, we feed as many as we can. Amid sickness, we bring help and relief.
7. Then again, sometimes we just bring a meal, or share a kind word or an embrace. And that makes all the difference. Each day, having been named and claimed by Christ, we have myriad choices about who we will be and what will we do. Reflecting on today's epistle reading, the inimitable Frederick Buechner writes of the little moments that make up a life: "All the absurd little meetings, decisions, inner skirmishes that go to make up our days. It all adds up to very little, and yet it all adds up to very much. Our days are full of nonsense, and yet not, because it is precisely into the nonsense of our days that God speaks to us words of great significance – not words that are written in the stars but words that are written into the raw staff and nonsense of our day, which are not nonsense just because God speaks into the midst of them."

In conclusion, Buechner writes, "And the words that God says, to each of us differently, are '*Be brave ... be merciful ... feed my lambs ... press on toward the goal.*'"

8. Luther might have thought the world was ending, but he also said this: *Fiat justitita et pereat mundus*. "Let justice be done though the world perish." My friends, things fall apart. And one day they will fall apart altogether. Yet Christ who was crucified is alive; the Temple been rebuilt, and the cosmos will one day be reborn. All of this is true. We can't stop the one or speed up the other. The question is what we will do in the meantime. As those who have been promised birth in the new world, let us live to God's glory in this one. Let us witness. Let us not grow weary in doing what is right. In short, let us ask in every moment, "How do I best love my neighbor?" Who knows what God can do through us in the meantime if we seek to live for others? Christ promises to give you words, which is to say, himself. Christ is with you. Go and love this broken, beautiful world as we wait for the world to come.  
Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.