

Luke 21:5-19 - "The Bedrock of Faith" (reference www.sermons.com)

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In the context of the American election on Tuesday, and its surprising results, and the fact that almost all polling predicted a different outcome, we come to our lessons from Scripture today, especially the passage from Luke when Jesus makes an ominous prediction about the future of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Have you ever tried to make a prediction? Here are some predictions from the past. All from people who were trusted individuals:

- Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, in 1943 said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."
- Popular Mechanics magazine in 1949 made this prediction: "Where a calculator on the ENIAC computer is equipped with 18,000 vacuum tubes and weighs 30 tons, computers in the future may have only 1,000 vacuum tubes and weigh only 1.5 tons."
- There was an inventor by the name of Lee DeForest. He claimed that "While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially it is an impossibility."
- The Decca Recording Co. made a big mistake when they made this prediction: "We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out." That was their prediction in 1962 concerning a few lads from Liverpool. Their band was called the Beatles.

As the disciples walked out of the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus paused with his disciples, looked back at the Temple and predicted, "**Do you see all these great buildings. Not one stone will be left on another.**" To the disciples this was bedrock. Nothing could bring down these walls. "**Look, teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!**" they said to Jesus. The smallest stones in the structure weighed 2 to 3 tons. Many of them weighed 50 tons. The largest existing stone is 12 meters in length and 3 meters high, and it weighed hundreds of tons! The stones were so immense that neither mortar nor any other binding material was used between the stones. Their stability was attained by the great weight of the stones. The walls towered over Jerusalem, over 400 feet in one area. Inside the four walls was 45 acres of bedrock mountain shaved flat and during Jesus' day a quarter of a million people could fit comfortably within the structure. No sports structure in North America today comes close. You can then understand the disciple's surprise.

As they walked down the Kidron valley and up the Mount of Olives, Peter, James and John wanted to hear more. Jesus' prediction that a structure so immense would be leveled to the ground seemed implausible. But they pressed Jesus for more information. They wanted to know when. What would be the sign that this was about to take place? In their voice was fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear that their lives were about to change forever. Jesus had not made any predictions comparable to this one

This was so different. This, they could not understand. Forty years later Jesus' prediction came true. In 70 A.D the Temple was destroyed by Rome.

What are we to learn from this prediction and its fulfillment?

First of all, the bedrock of faith is not in Temples. Try to place yourself in first century Jerusalem. From anywhere in the city you can look up and catch a glimpse of the Temple. The 45-year project of King Herod was the third such Temple. It had been the center of their national life for a thousand years.

- In the Temple the Jews sacrificed.
- Confessed their Sins.
- Gave their first fruits of the harvest.
- Yearly sacrificed a lamb for the nations' sins.
- It was here that Passover, the harvest feast of Pentecost, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and Feast of Weeks was celebrated.

With the Temple so central to their life and worship, this major question then arises:

How would they worship God without the Temple?

It was a question for which the Disciples had no answer.

We understandably get tied to things. We can even develop sentimental attachments to them. But the Temple was unique. God himself is said in Deuteronomy to be the architect giving the exact dimension of the Altar, the grounds, the Walls, the doors, down to the very size of the stones. This was God's building.

- It is the place where John's birth was announced,
- Jesus' pre-eminence was recognized by Simeon and Anna when by Jewish law the first-born son was presented to God in the Temple and named
- Jesus' religious intelligence was recognized by the leaders at age 12,
- Where the money changers were driven out years later.
- It was here that Paul was arrested.

With the Temple so central to their lives, how would they worship God without it?

I like this story told about Joseph Haydn in his later years. On a special evening at the Vienna Music Hall his oratorio "The Creation" was being performed. As the majestic work moved along, the audience was caught up with tremendous emotion. When the passage "And there was light!" was reached, the chorus and orchestra burst forth in such power that the crowd could no longer restrain its enthusiasm. The vast assembly rose, spontaneous applause in the middle of the piece. Haydn weakened by age and confined to a wheelchair struggled to stand and motioned for silence. **With his hand pointed toward heaven, he said,**

.... **"Not from me—everything comes from up there!"**

For many of us, the bedrock of our Christian faith has been the churches we have attended. This year we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the building of St. Mark's. From 1866 to 1917 the church building and congregation experienced great growth in the north end with a number of enlargements of the building and the building a large parish hall to accommodate community activities. St. Mark's was on a roll. Then the un-thinkable happened, the explosion on December 6, 1917 destroyed it all. We, Grove Presbyterian, Kaye Street Methodist, St. Joseph's – our buildings were all destroyed in a matter of seconds.

With the Temple so central to their life and worship this major question then arises: How would they worship God without the Temple? It was a question for which the Disciples had no answer.

Times had radically changed from the despair of the Jews at the destruction of their temple to 1917 and the loss of four church buildings. With St. Mark's people making up 200 of the 2000 dead, the survivors could have just given up. But they didn't. First aid stations and soup kitchens were immediately setup, the dead were buried, the injured treated, the rubble cleared away and within 4 years – St. Joseph's was restored and the new United Memorial and our present building came into being.

Today the question is different. We have too many Anglican Temples, not enough people to fill them, not enough funds to keep them in good repair. Within our own region, since my arrival in the spring of 2011, St. Philip's, Purcell's Cove and St. Matthias ended their history of Anglican Worship in favour of two Orthodox congregations repurposing those buildings. Each year our Bishop has to deconsecrate at least one church, mostly in rural areas of NS or PEI.

The Christian church, this diocese and this parish has endured and will continue to endure change. At St. Mark's we have welcomed a few new people over the years, and said goodbye to others. Keeping the building in good repair, supporting the outreach ministries of the daycare and Ward 5 in our parish hall, operating the food bank on a weekly basis, has tested us and will continue to test us in terms of money and volunteer time. With my anticipated retirement in mid-2018, leadership will change. What will future clerical leadership look like? Part-time paid ministry, amalgamation, closure and sale? Only God knows.

It seems that everyone is complaining --- if not about the changes already made, then about the failure to make still more changes. I do not here want to argue for or against change.

I only want to suggest that the readings today be heard as offering a better perspective on the whole subject as to what we call change and the future.

Change is only change from the perspective of one who is standing still. Change is only from the perspective we have of life when we locate ourselves firmly in the middle, with everything else revolving around us. This is an understandable perspective --- for sinners.

Sinners locate themselves securely in the centre of the world. What they 'like' is what is 'right'. For those who stand in the perspective of Jesus Christ, however, it is GOD who is the center.! Instead of complaining about change, **we would do better to be asking ourselves where God is in change, what is God saying to us, and how God is asking us to respond.**

So why are we reading and hearing these lessons of doom and gloom? As our church year draws to an end at the end of this month, the readings we hear on Sunday sound increasingly urgent with warnings and alarms. "Nation will rise up against nation... and there will be dreadful portents and signs from heaven (from today's reading from Lk 21:10-11). We are being confronted with the future and this future is ominous. Why indeed? It could be because the Church is about reality, not make-believe. And reality --- in our day as in the time of Jesus' birth --- is full of ominous things. Looking at the future can be scary.

"So much of our current energy is spent on survival at the local level of our churches. And so many of these efforts and worries are linked to our financial circumstances. Can we afford a fulltime priest? How will we repair the roof? And can we pay the Diocesan apportionment? How can we attract more parishioners so that we can survive a little longer? But questions about survival, desperate as they may seem, are not the fundamental issues facing us today. Instead, we must dare to look beyond survival and ask: 'Why does Christ want the Church to survive? What are His purposes as well as ours?' After all, he is the head, we are merely members of the body.

So the readings at this season of the church year tell us at least one thing that we need to hear. God is in charge of the future. Christ will come again, means that Jesus is Lord of the future, just as much as of the past and present. In the worst situations, Jesus will give his followers the wisdom and confidence of his presence. Confronting disaster, Christians should not respond with hysteria, but with patience and endurance. We are therefore asked to live into the future strong and secure in his Name. We are asked to look at the future with eyes alert to discern his Coming. And so to our hope we sing, O Come O Come Emmanuel. That Christ will continue to take a central part in our personal and congregational life; Our prayer should be that we can accept that changes that must be made for His Glory, and not our own.

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