

Sermon 11-16-25, Lk 21:5-19

Pastor Megan asked me to lead worship and preach this Sunday while she's attending the youth gathering, I checked my schedule and agreed.

Later when I read the text I thought "ugh... I don't like this one"

It's hard to preach on something I don't particularly like

And maybe that's actually the key to today's Gospel message

Similar to the disciples,

We don't like what Jesus has to say sometimes

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I love the Gospel of Luke and his focus on social justice

And when I zoomed out of this particular passage to what's happening in Luke's narrative, it clicked for me

So let's zoom out together / / /

Jesus has been sitting in, teaching and preaching in, the temple since the end of chapter 19 when he entered the temple, caused a scene and said "My house shall be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of robbers"...

This disruption inspired the leaders to continue to look for a way to kill Jesus

And he remains within the temple through the rest of chapter 21 until chapter 22 when the Passover begins, starting his journey to the cross

We're in the midst of Jesus' speed round to get his point across before he's gone

And he's intense about it

Jesus' focus in the temple is one of redirection

Stones and destruction aren't unique to his warning today

Back in 20:17 He said “the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone... everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces”

The religious leaders’ desire to kill Jesus fueled their questioning of him

They kept challenging Jesus, trying to trip him up on technicalities about taxes and marriage

Jesus continued to warn and redirect the people

Toward issues he saw as more important

Beware of the scribes who dress all fancy and look powerful

Look at this poor widow giving all she has to this oppressive system

But the disciples get uncomfortable and attempt a redirection of their own

They say – oh, but look how pretty and incredible and awesome this temple is!

Let’s take a break from all of these hard conversations and admire the centerpiece of our community and place that honors the one true God

Surely Jesus will agree with us on this topic!

Jesus doesn’t falter -- and says: well, guess what, it will be destroyed! so let’s focus on something lasting

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Jesus’ message reminds me of the Buddhist teaching of impermanence, and releasing attachment

The Buddhist teacher, Ajahn Chah, said:

“You see this goblet? For me this glass is already broken. I enjoy it. I drink out of it. It holds my water admirably, sometimes even reflecting the sun in beautiful patterns. If I should tap it, it has a lovely ring to it. But when I put this glass on a shelf and the wind knocks it over, or my elbow brushes it off the table and it falls to the ground and shatters, I say, ‘Of course.’ When I understand that this glass is already broken, every moment with it is precious. Every moment is just as it is, and nothing need be otherwise.”

The glass is all ready broken

The temple is all ready destroyed

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But the disciples are alarmed and want to be prepared for this horrible destruction

They cling to the temple and the comfort and security it offers

So they ask, how will they know it's coming?!

What can they do?!

And Jesus doesn't answer them directly, as he never does

But he instructs them to: "Beware"

"Do not be led astray"

"Do not be terrified" and leaves them with

"By your endurance you will gain your souls" / / /

The Jesus we see in Luke is not cozy or comforting

He's on a mission

He's provocative in the way he is trying to make us see the ugliness of the world and human nature

He's frustrating in the way he keeps pointing out the things we'd rather look away from

Like the impermanence of the solid places where we rest our assurance - like these stone buildings

Like the uncertainty of societal structures of power and wealth that we benefit from

Like the particularities of taxes and marriage that distract us from the real focus of loving God and loving our neighbor

Like the cruel and violent actions of powerful leaders masked by the fancy veneer of wealth and beauty

Like the oppressive systems that benefit from the poverty of others

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The disciples want to escape this doom and gloom

Don't we?

They attempt a distraction, admiring the awesomeness of this enormous and gorgeous temple that is dedicated to God

At least we have this common ground, right?

But Jesus won't give them a break

He's on a mission – then -- and now

To challenge our view of the world and guide us toward seeing clearly

Whatever you see will be destroyed

The glass is all ready broken

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I wonder about the metaphorical “temples” of beauty and distraction today?

What are our “temples” of escape?

What are the places in which we find reassurance that will eventually crumble?

What are the “temples” to which we're attached that are actually impermanent?

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I'm sure we could compile a long list...

I think of the saying “my body is my temple”

How preoccupation with a body too large or too small distracts from loving that body as a gift from God

And adorning that body – with clothes, jewelry, tattoos, -- can be
consuming of our precious time, energy and resources

I think of the ways we resist acknowledging and embracing our aging
bodies / / /

I think of our places...

Our homes and even this sanctuary and the amount of energy we expend
maintaining and improving our spaces

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I think of the “temples” within our minds...

The striving and achieving parts

The protective and defensive parts

That prevent us from resting and loving our whole selves

And render us unable to fully love and be loved by others

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This is hard. . .

We could go on, but that’s not really Jesus’ point, is it?

It’s not Jesus’ point to identify our faults and distractions

No, we do that well enough ourselves

The disciples did that themselves

Jesus’ point is to redirect us toward God and what is everlasting

Jesus’ point is to remind us of what we can really cling to

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Jesus’ message is “Beware”

“Do not be led astray”

“Do not be terrified”

Jesus calls us to focus on what's real and true

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He says these messages today in the negative sense

But within these warnings I also hear:

“I am the truth”

“The truth will set you free”

“Come, follow me”

“Set down your burdens, I will give you rest”

“My yoke is easy, my burden is light”

These messages of Jesus' love and healing and safety are directly connected to the warnings we hear today

It's all the same message

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All that you see

All that you count on

All that you take comfort in

Is destroyed

The glass is all ready broken

But what remains?

When the literal and metaphorical temples crumble

When the glass is broken

What is left?

Where is the good news? / / /

It comes only from remembering the truth that we worship a crucified God who loves and knows us completely and continues to remain with us in the midst of destruction and even death.

God's love is permanent

God's redemption is permanent

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We have a big task in supporting one another in remembering this

And in being witnesses to this truth in this world

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Restoration comes after destruction

This is a truth we so desperately need to cling to

Remembering that new life will come after death

Knowing that God is bigger than all of it

This promise isn't just enough

It's the main thing

God is always making us new!

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By our endurance we will gain our souls.

Amen.