

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 21:5–28 (29–36)

Sermon: Always Faithful

As the days of Pentecost grow ever shorter and the Church Year approaches its end, so our Readings give voice to fears surrounding the growing darkness. Surrounded by so much evil, destruction, and chaos, and a recognition that “heaven and earth will pass away,” is nevertheless the sure and certain promise of God that his “words will not pass away.” We are encouraged that we “not grow weary in doing good” (*Epistle*), but we know the challenge of living in the last days—when evil seems to have the upper hand and the great tribulation awaits those who try and live lives of faithfulness. Through good and bad, as Christians we pray to God, “Rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may live and abide forever in Your Son” (*Collect*).

The final promise of God in the Introit is sure: ***“The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”***

Our text for this the 2nd to last Sunday of the Church year begins on a high, with Jesus’ disciples marveling at the beauty of their beloved temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus knows that soon and for much of the rest of their lives they will face dangers, catastrophes, and most of them, agonizing death.

The majesty of the temple, the security of Jesus’ visible presence, even the stability of the world itself, would be torn down, ripped away, crumbled. Then how would they feel? Then where would they find comfort? Where is God to be found when life is difficult and we have trouble feeling and finding his presence in our lives?

Many especially in our world today wonder where is God in all this mess, the good news is that God is as He always has been active and working in our lives and in the world around us. No matter how bad things get God is still in control. Satan and those who belong to him do whatever they can to try and get us to forget that God is always faithful and never abandons us.

When we see the natural and man-made disasters around the world we can wonder what's going on, such as the recent earthquakes in Italy and this past week in Oklahoma. Where is God when the world is full of wars and violence? Where is God in this world of moral decay? We all can think of situations that cause us to tremble.

But as we look at history and especially Scripture none of these things should cause us any surprise. Look at for instance our Gospel lesson.

As they were admiring the temple and all its fancy adornment Jesus tells them; ***“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”*** And we know from history that is exactly what happened but did you know that the temple restoration that began about 20 BC by Herod lasted until 63 AD just seven years prior to its total destruction in 70 AD.

It shouldn't have been a surprise to anyone, God had warned them time and time again but they did not repent. Why did God allow these events to happen, because the Israelites had not remained faithful? It shouldn't be surprising to us either that these things are happening today. The disciples ask for a sign so that they will know when the temple would be destroyed.

Now remember for the Jew the temple was the center of their life it could be seen from any location in Jerusalem so naturally the disciples were concerned. But Jesus had more in mind when He told them of the destruction of the temple. Look again at our Gospel; ***“See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.” Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences...”*** Jesus was preparing the disciples and us for the events that must happen before the end when He will return. While we wait though Jesus tells us that these things are an opportunity for us to bear witness.

We see it happening even today, the terrors and signs that Jesus foretold, worldly destruction and devastation. God is present in the world even when all these things make us feel He is absent.

As we get ready to start the church year with Advent we are reminded that the whole reason for Jesus coming into the world was so that we might be reconciled to God. Sin had driven a wedge between God and the world, our sin separates us from God, but Jesus' death on a cross has removed that separation.

Now God gives His Spirit to guide and council, to provide testimony and wisdom in times of trial and persecution. In those times, we bear witness to what God has done in Christ and is doing every day until He returns. God will reign in the evil; evil's time will come to an end. Everything that is happening, even though we don't understand it must happen for a while longer. Then Christ will return to bring final redemption to the world.

God is still present in our lives and the life of every believer. It can be difficult to be a Christian today, ask the couple who owned the bakery or ask the owner of Hobby Lobby or ask any Christian who is ridiculed for their faith or the child told that they can't read their Bible at school. Living morally and passing morality on to our children is increasingly difficult. Turn on the television just about any time of the day or night and you'll see examples of immoral living.

The church in our day seem to be shrinking. Things that we used to cling to, like the stones of the temple are being cast down. Legal protections we always thought we could count on will be over-turned. More and more we will be called before "kings and governors" courts and employers to account for our Christian faith.

The persecution Christians face is often deeply personal, even dividing families. Yet God will always be present in the life of the believer even if we don't see Him.

The blessings of Jesus' cross have been given personally to each of us in our Baptism. We have been reconciled to God, He is always with us. We can say with the Psalmist; ***"My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."*** (Psalm 121:2)

"The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore." (Ps 121:8)

When we face difficulty in our personal journey with God or disappointment with the world, when God seems more absent than present, we are not alone. It's a challenge that goes back to the earliest days of the Church, a struggle in the lives of the saints throughout history.

In those moments when we're tempted to despair, we do not cling to feelings or despair at the absence of feelings, but rather we embrace the promises of God, whose Word and Spirit never fail to sustain the believer through life . . . and even unto death.

Amen