

23rd Sunday after Pentecost November 13 2022

Luke 21:5-19

We see in our gospel reading today the reality that Advent used to be a longer season. Similar in length to Lent and its focus was on the second coming of Jesus and the last judgment. You hear echoes of this in our readings over the next few weeks and especially this week.

We have in our reading Luke's version of what is called in Mark the "little apocalypse". Now we tend to think of an apocalypse as a cataclysmic event with widespread destruction and fear. However, this genre in biblical literature actually means an unveiling or revealing of things. It is a peeling back of the curtain to see what lies behind. Here it is a peeling back related to the promise of Jesus to come again and that when he arrives the kingdom of God that he established will come fully into being. The restoration of the relationship of people and creation with God will be fulfilled. Made complete.

Now, this will mean a realignment of things in the world which will certainly be a tumultuous time- just look at what happens in the house when you are doing spring cleaning or a major clean-out. But the ultimate end will be worth it. Things brought back into order.

I have talked about how we can read Gospels on three levels. The first is that of the story itself- Jesus talking to the disciples who have asked him a question. The second is to the assembly of believers who the author of Luke is writing this version of the life and ministry of Jesus to. The third is to us here and now. This text is one that we can do all three very easily.

What Jesus is telling the disciples in this text would have had the assembly hearing this Gospel read to them nodding their heads. They would have experienced the upheaval and insurrection of the Jews that led to the bloody destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE. They would have been persecuted by both Jewish authorities and the Romans. Their following Jesus would have torn them from their families and led to their being betrayed into the hands of the authorities because of their beliefs. Jesus is describing their current or at least recent lived reality.

The promise makes throughout is that God is with them. Now, we know that there are always these signs and portents going on throughout human history. Things that people have always pointed to and said, "Now is the time!" We see it ourselves today- hurricanes smacking the coasts one after another, mega-droughts that drain the reservoirs, wars of aggression that kill tens of thousands for human vanity, upheavals and conflicts as people struggle for power in our nation. But Jesus tamps down expectations about his coming again, you see these things, yep, but... it will be a while yet.

So, what are we to do in the meantime? Jesus gives only three commands in our text today.

First, watch! "Beware (literally watch!) that you are not led astray by those who say, "I am Jesus!" or "The time is near". Don't be reactive. Watch! It's not, Go! But rather, watch, look closely at something, examine it before you act. And don't be led off the path Jesus calls you to follow.

Second, what is translated as "Make up your minds not to prepare a defense in advance." Literally it is a command to "Put it in your hearts... settle it in your

mind right now, not to prepare a defense.” Rather, trust God to provide what you will need. God will give you in that moment the response. One based on what Jesus has told us, to love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us. One Jesus took to the cross when as he was being crucified, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.”

Then finally we are told to “possess/keep our souls in patient endurance”. To wait and endure. To be faithful, even in the face of trials. To be faithful and follow Jesus even when persecuted. To be faithful and wait, because God is with us even in the midst of that persecution, in the midst of those trials, in the midst of natural disasters. And if we watch and follow Jesus, if we trust in God to give us what we need to defend ourselves, if we patiently endure, then we will come out the other side.

When we are stressed by the natural disasters around us. The wars external and internal. The challenges in our own lives. When we start wanting to know, when will it all be over! When! Jesus’ response to us is the same today as it was to his disciples in Jerusalem and to that community assembled to hear the Gospel of Luke. Watch, be careful that you are not led astray by those who seem to have all the answers. Who say, follow me, I’ll get you out of this. Jesus says, follow me only. Decide now that you will trust in God to provide for your defense. Be patient in enduring what you are going through and trust that God is with you and that will make even this moment in life fuller and more abundant than if you try and go it alone.

The good news is that the God who claimed us in the waters of baptism does not abandon us. That God is faithful and is with us even in the midst of trials and

tribulations. So let us watch, make up our minds, and be patient in our faithfulness to that God who comes to us in Jesus Christ.

Who knows what it is to suffer patiently, who knows us and our plight because he has been there himself. And in whom we find freedom from the culture of death and violence that we are bound up in. In whom we find life, love, joy, and peace. Thanks be to God!