

Luke 21: 5-19 "Fallen Temples" Rev. Janet Chapman 11/13/22

A story is told about a rural country preacher who asked a farmer, "Do you belong to the Christian family?" "No," said the farmer, "they live two farms down." "No, no! I mean are you lost?" "No," said the farmer, "I've been here 30 years." The preacher clarified, "I mean are you ready for Judgment Day?" "When is it?" asked the farmer. "It could be tomorrow or the next day," said the preacher. "Well, when you find out for sure when it is, let me know. My wife will probably want to go both days!" Every generation, at some time in its history, has thought its time was the end of times, that Judgment Day was around the corner, even if we can't pin down the exact day. Our current generation is no exception as escalating nuclear tensions arise with Russia and North Korea; climate change ushers in hotter world temperatures; hurricanes, wildfires, flooding, tornadoes and pandemics increase dramatically; and divisions grow even wider between groups of people who disagree. Preaching today's text after one of the most influential mid-term elections in our nation's history gives me some apprehension, to say the least. Some of you may have seen the photo on Facebook of the church sign from a few weeks ago which said, "Jesus is coming... hopefully before the election."

Yet we are still here today, and no matter how you feel about how the results panned out, we are left with the question how to pick up the pieces after an election cycle that has been contentious at best and at worst, has exposed the underbelly of all that we wish we could pretend did not exist in our world. Such divisions in our nation only reiterate the reality that we don't speak the same language. We may be speaking English, even using the same accent, but the different ways we perceive, process, and interpret reality are at odds with

each other. The following notice was sent home with some high school students: "Our school's cross-graded, multiethnic, individualized learning program is designed to enhance the concept of an open-ended learning program on the continuum of multiethnic, academically enriched learning, using the identified intellectually gifted child as the agent of his/her own learning." One parent sent back a note that read, "I have a college degree and speak 2 foreign languages and four Indian dialects, but I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about." We often don't speak the same language, do we?

In the Gospels, as Thomas Long points out, all the characters speak in Greek but they do not speak the same language. In Luke, Jesus warns the disciples that the language he gives them is a language that the powers of this world cannot comprehend as he says, "I'll give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to counter or contradict." Jesus and the world don't speak the same language. Jesus speaks grace; the world speaks of keeping track of every wrong. Jesus speaks of pouring one's self out in love; the world speaks of using brute force. Jesus speaks truth; the world makes up its own truth. Jesus speaks of the immense value of the widow's mite; the world scoffs. Jesus speaks of fallen temples; the world glorifies their wealth and beauty. Jesus says trust in God; the world says trust in demagogues and cryptocurrency. Jesus and the world don't speak the same language.

As we reflect on Jesus' words today, it is important to remember that how we speak about something has everything to do with what we see. How we perceive our world and circumstances shape our words and tone of speech. Jesus attempts to divert the attention of his disciples, and in turn us, away from their fascination with the things they see before them. Today's text is

considered apocalyptic speech as it anticipates the end of the world as we see it. Some refer to it as the end times, but with respect to language, others perceive it as the beginning all over again, a restart for creation. This may seem like a radically new approach, but legend has it that Martin Luther from the 16th century was once asked what he would do if he learned the world were coming to an end. He responded, "If tomorrow is the Day of Judgment, then today I want to plant an apple tree." Luther seems to model the purpose of apocalyptic literature which, despite its unsettling language and terrifying imagery, is a means to assure the faithful that we should keep our trust in God even when facing the most challenging of circumstances. There is nothing original or specific about the circumstances Jesus predicts for every age has had its own chaos. That doesn't stop people from trying to determine the day or time but Jesus is far more concerned with the point that when bad things happen – and they most certainly will – don't be afraid and don't fall prey to those who proclaim these are signs of God's judgment and the end. Jesus' language is not the language of those TV evangelists who blamed the 9/11 terrorist attacks on certain groups who promote an alternative lifestyle and try to secularize America. Jesus' language is not the language of those preachers who blamed Hurricane Katrina on the so-called amoral conditions of New Orleans. Jesus' language is not the language of a reporter who just this week said the reason the election didn't go their way was because too many single women voted and what was needed was to marry those women off – just put a ring on it. Jesus and the world don't speak the same language.

Jesus invites us to look past the fallen temples, past the natural disasters, past the liars, past the short-sightedness of antagonizers, to fix your gaze on

what is true and honorable. I wonder if we can learn to see what Jesus sees, learn to see whom Jesus sees? Karoline Lewis writes, "If your eyes are locked on only that which is temporary, you might miss the permanency of those things that last. If you only see the obvious grandeur and splendor, you may overlook beauty in those things that first appeared unattractive, even repulsive. If you focus only on the damaging, the destructive, the devastating for long periods of time, then you might miss what is affirming, constructive and encouraging. What you see determines what you have chosen to see – that might seem way too obvious, but it's true. This isn't intentional optimism or a glass half full kind of philosophy, but it is the true claim of the true hope we have in God." In these days when it seems that the church has grown powerless in the face of all that works against the realm of God, God is still present and powerful working in and among us to bring about change, hope, and renewal. Jesus says, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down...but by standing firm, (holding fast) you will gain your lives, (your very souls.)"

In all the chaos around us, Jesus reminds us it is an opportunity to testify, to get into some good trouble, to tell the truth we know comes from God and God alone. Jesus says don't try to have a prepared speech, because you will have to respond ad hoc with the truth you know in Jesus. The English has it as, "I will give you words," but the Greek is "I will give you mouth." You will know how to use your mouth, your words at the time, because the guidance of Christ is powerful and immediate in a church that stays on mission, in a faithful follower that stands firm. This is a really hard one for me, I confess – the solace of my car has been witness to many a speech I concocted against a reckless

driver, a rude petition seeker who cuts me off at the Wal-Mart entrance, or a hateful media anchor spewing divisive lies. Most speeches stay right there in my car and rightfully so in order not to cause further unnecessary trouble or division.

However, there was one moment when I had no speech prepared, no preparation whatsoever, and had to speak on instinct. It was right after church in Selma as we were filing out of worship, the children running ahead of me to get to the prize basket I had set outside for them. As I caught up with them, I noticed across the street, 3 adults shouting, fighting, and kicking each other in the front yard. One man pulled a knife, threw a woman to the ground and started dragging her by the hair. Without thinking, dressed in my robe and stole, I stomped across the street and yelled, "Hey, you are children of God and this is not how God's children treat each other." All stopped where they were, stunned and then a bit ashamed. Then came the blaming, who did what first. As church folks called the police, I just blurted out, "I don't care who started it, it's time to end it, because all God's children are watching right now." It was not the language they were used to, but the truth translated with the Spirit's power. Now is the time for the language of God to take over the language of the world; now is the time for truth-telling. The mouth that Jesus gives tells a truth that is simple, direct and clear. The mouth of the faithful church is always on the side of justice, mercy, unity, and compassion and against fear, greed, division, and brutality. Our text isn't a timetable, it's a word of comfort, courage, and invitation. If you have the courage for truth-telling, you will most certainly get into some good trouble but, as Jesus says, "by standing firm, you will win your souls." Thanks be to God!