Twenty Third Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 21:5-19

*Jesus brings new life through change*

On April 15th of this year Notre Dame Cathedral, one of the most iconic Christian Churches in the world, suffered massive structural damage from a fire. Many watched helplessly around the world as the iconic structure was engulfed in flames and many priceless works of art were damaged or destroyed.

After the fire was put out an iconic photograph was taken showing the burned out debris littering part of the floor in the Cathedral, and yet there shining brightly on one of the altars was a cross.

Many donations have already come in to help rebuild the Cathedral but even so Notre Dame will never again be the same as it was. How can it be the same after such an event? Yet the most important thing is not the building itself but the cross inside and who it represents.

In our reading from the Gospel according to St. Luke Jesus is continuing to teach in the Temple area and he hears some people talking about how wonderful, grand, and elaborate the Temple is.

The Temple was the heart of the Jewish religion. It was where faithful Jews gathered to pray, it was believed to be built on the spot where God stopped Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac, it was where important documents like wills were kept, it was where people gathered to offer sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of sins, and it was where God was believed to dwell on earth.

Jesus and his followers were devout Jews. Throughout the gospels we hear how Jesus faithfully goes to Jerusalem to observe important Jewish holidays. We hear how Jesus prays and teaches in the Temple area. We hear in the Gospel of Luke how Mary and Joseph lost Jesus and after looking for 3 days found he had been in the Temple the entire time teaching and debating with religious leaders.

Jesus was a faithful and devout Jew and so he would have deeply loved the Temple and understood its importance. Yet in our reading Jesus hears how some people praising the Temple for its beauty and majesty and what does he say?

“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.”

It can’t be understated how shocking this would be to his followers to hear this. Imagine the hurt it would cause to tell a devout Roman Catholic that as beautiful as the Vatican is it will be utterly torn down and not a stone will remain. Imagine the hurt it would cause you for Jesus to look at our worship space and tell us:

“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.”

Yet as much as Jesus loves the Temple, he delivers this shocking message to his followers. Jesus then goes on to tell his followers to not listen when anyone comes along after him claiming to be the messiah, or that they have a perfect timeline for all God’s plans including the last days.

 Jesus talks about how there will be war and violence and that even his followers should expect to suffer persecution and even death for their faith in him. Yet he assures his followers that their faith in him will bring them to everlasting life and that in Jesus not a single hair from their heads will truly perish.

This is a tough reading especially the part about the Temple, because it is a message that is just as relevant for us to hear.

As human beings we can’t help but want security, control, and for the things we love to always remain the way to remember them. This is a perfectly normal human desire. This is because our world is always changing and at times we are not ready for it and we may not even like it.

Fashion and technology change at fast and dramatic rates. Anyone else remember 8 tracks, cassette tapes and typewriters? Now we have digital music and computers so powerful they can drive cars and control other machines.

The environment is quickly changing. Many areas that were once forests or protected wildlife areas are now apartment complexes or being drilled for oil or gas to keep up with Americas dramatic energy use.

Even our congregations, perhaps the place we want the most to stay the same, are not immune from change. Notice how we are not having worship in German or Finnish, or the fact that you called me a woman to be your pastor. These are both examples of change that would have seemed impossible for previous worshiping generations.

Whether we like it or not change will come to even our most treasured and beloved things. Temple that Jesus loved and taught in, the Temple that the faithful thought would last forever, was destroyed by the Romans over 1,900 years ago. Notre Dame Cathedral an icon of Christian worship for over 800 years has burned.

The truth is no building, even the most beloved church, can or will last forever. So, if we base our Christian faith on a building, if we base our faith on one, if we believe God’s love for us is dependent on maintaining a building, if we place all our self-worth on trying to keep things as they were when we grew up with them then we will fail and be disappointed.

That is why our Christian faith is not based on a place or building. Our Christian faith is based on a who. It is built around and is completely dependent upon Jesus Christ the Son of God our Lord. That is were we get our identity, where we are reminded of our worth, and where we are given the most loving and wonderful promises of God.

Our faith is based on the tradition handed down to us about how God so loved us and creation that God came down from heaven to be born as one of us. By the virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit God became human as Jesus Christ. God did this to save us and so we can never claim God does not understand what it is to be human.

Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us then spent his life healing, casting out demons, preaching, teaching, forgiving sins, and welcoming everyone to come into the Kingdom of God.

When the time came Jesus willingly went to the cross to suffer and die for us because God loves us enough to die for us to free us from bondage to sin, death, and the devil.

Jesus, God made flesh, did not stay dead but rose from the dead conquering death and taking away its power over us so that all who believe receive the promise of the bodily resurrection to come and eternal life.

Jesus continues to demonstrate God’s love for us in the free gift of Holy Baptism where we receive the forgiveness of sin, become children of God, brothers and sisters to Jesus himself, we receive the promise of the bodily resurrection to come, and we are joined to the life and story of Jesus.

Jesus then feed us with his own body and blood in bread and wine at the altar so we continue to receive the forgiveness of sin, receive the Holy Spirit, have our faith as the body of Christ: the Church strengthened, and are empowered to go and share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

When we base our hopes, dreams, identity, faith, or self-worth on anything but Jesus our Lord we will be disappointed. When we remember that our faith, identity, and our lives are built around the person and story of Jesus Christ the Son of God we will never be disappointed, because Jesus has never and will never fail or forget us.

Instead whether buildings close or crumble, whether languages and cultures change, no matter how the world will look 5, 50, or 500 years from now we do not fear and we do not feel hopelessness because we are the people of God claimed in water and Word, fed with the body of Jesus in bread and wine, and we remember that Jesus will always be with us just as he always has been. Amen.