

Luke 21:5-19 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

If you've looked around the stores, and even some homes, decorations for Christmas have been up for weeks. It seems as though people are trying to extend the Christmas season, searching for the joy that comes with the celebration. Here in the church, we don't start to celebrate the season of Christmas until after Christmas Eve. However, we do prepare for Christmas with the season of Advent which is just 2 weeks away. The first unday of Advent is the beginning of the church year. That means we have 2 weeks, this week and next of the church year left. In today's gospel from Luke Jesus is again teaching in the temple as Luke has him doing daily the week he was in Jerusalem. Next week we end the year with Christ the King Sunday when we celebrate the sovereign reign of Christ ending the church year with Luke's account of Jesus's death on the cross.

It is close to the time that Jesus will be arrested, the air is charged with energy. The disciples know something is about to happen but they still think Jesus is going to triumphantly deliver Israel from Roman bondage, that the Messiah will act with power and glory. Jesus knows differently. Jesus knows what is coming. And he doesn't step away or back down, instead he challenges the religious leaders and the people with the foreshadowing of the fall of the temple. "You see these big stones? The days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." I'm sure that did not buy him points with the Pharisees and Sadducees and other religious rulers.

Of course, the people had the same questions as we have today, "When will the time come?" Jesus didn't give them a straight answer because we know that Jesus didn't and may still not know the answer to that question. Instead he lets them know of what is to come and warns them not to follow false leaders. The majority of us here today have seen false leaders, David Koresch, Jim Jones, Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles the leaders of Heaven's Gate, and most likely there are others who have not been identified. Not only have there been false leaders, as you know there have been false calculations of when the earth would end, and even those brazen enough to believe the rapture would take place on September 23, 2025. No one knows the date or the time except God. The amazing thing about this is that God is not going to completely destroy the earth. God is going to make all things new and then heaven and earth will become one.

Jesus warns in Luke's gospel that there will be terrible things that will happen before the earth is changed and he returns. We have been studying the book of Revelation in Bible study. When looked at as an apocalyptic writing, humanity is in for some terrible times. Although Christians have been persecuted from day one, except for this era that has been considered Christianity the prime religion beginning with the conversion of Constantine in 312 A.D. Yet even in this era there are pockets of the world where Christians fear for their lives. North Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Libia, Yemen and Nigeria are places today it is not safe to be Christian. However, Revelation and today's gospel reading can both be read to reflect what was going on at the time and in their near future. Jesus was letting his followers know that it wasn't going to be an easy road for them to walk.

In the words of the writers of the SALT Commentary: "Think of it this way: Luke begins his Gospel with Mary singing that God's mission is to "lift up the lowly," "scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts," and "bring down the powerful from their

thrones” (Luke 1:51-52). And now, in Jesus’ last sermon, we confront the difficult truth that this world-turning work will involve struggle and loss, trials and adversity. Jesus’ passion is about to begin. The path to new life leads through “the place that is called ‘The Skull’ (Luke 23:33)”.

“But it doesn’t end there! The same path continues on beyond the cross to the empty tomb, the dawn of a new chapter in salvation history. Despite the coming trials — or indeed precisely in the midst of them, now reframed not as setbacks but as “signs” of redemption’s approach — we should remain encouraged, trusting that Mary’s song is unfolding all around us, a new creation being born. ‘Not a hair on your head will perish,’ Jesus declares (Luke 21:18). And if we’re called upon to testify, ‘I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand’ (Luke 21:15).

But the good news is that those who walk the narrow path, those who follow the teachings of Jesus, who live out the good news of the gospel, will survive. The Holy Spirit will give them words to speak when they are brought up against a tribunal. We know the end of the story, and God wins. All that is ahead of this world will bring about God’s changes to earth so that the kingdom of God may take its rightful place on this earth that God created. Yet, that does not mean we are to stop doing what is right in the eyes of Jesus.

We are to welcome the stranger, love our neighbors, and despite what the reading from 2nd Thessalonians 3:10 said today, we are to feed the hungry. That’s Jesus’ mandate. The letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonians was written because some of the Christians in the church in Thessalonica had misunderstandings regarding the return of Jesus. Either they believed Jesus was coming right away or had already come and they had missed it, which by the way I believe from what I’ve read in the Bible that will be impossible to do.

Paul writes to them to advise them they are being irresponsible busybodies, interfering with the work that is being done by others. He lets them know Jesus has not returned, nor does the return of Jesus validate their non-work ethic. They should be working up until the day Jesus returns. But what about the widows and children? What about the sick? What about those who are unable to work? What about those who work but don’t make enough money to cover the rent and eat too? Jesus has told us that as Christ-followers we are to care for them.

We don’t do it to earn us a place in heaven when the time comes. We do it because we love Jesus and out of that love for Jesus, we help those in need. I’m going to end with the last line of our reading from Malachi 4:2a: “But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.” When we follow the ways of Jesus we will find joy.
All glory be to God.’

