**Luke 21:5-19** November 13, 2022

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 *Luke 21:5 Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 6“As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down…”*

 *12But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you… 16You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 17All men will hate you because of me. 18But not a hair of your head will perish. 19By standing firm you will gain life.”*

*[For a full reading, consult your Bible]*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Stand Firm**

 It’s a sentence you have heard more than once, “After what I’ve seen, I don’t know if I can believe in God.” Or, “How can a loving God let \_\_\_\_ happen?” Sometimes it comes from people you expect it to come from—those who have never known their loving Lord and Savior. Sometimes, maybe even more often, it comes from those who once acclaimed Jesus as Lord, but now that flame flickers faintly. Bad things happen and some think those bad things delegitimize God, at least until he issues an apology.

 It happens to people, or rather people let it happen to them. Jesus didn’t want it happening to his Twelve—which, I believe, accounts for his wet blanket approach to his disciples.

 It was the joyous Passover week. Hundreds of thousands of believers were crowded into Jerusalem. For three days Jesus had been repeatedly sending off his sly, dishonest opponents with their tails between their legs. The disciples couldn’t help but feel safe and content with Jesus in charge—kind of like your dog after she gets an extra bit from the table and contentedly rolls around on her back on the living room carpet… That was Jesus’ disciples at the beginning of our reading.

 They were at the Lord God’s temple in Jerusalem. Even in our day the Jerusalem temple would be an impressive building—how much more so 2,000 years ago. It had taken 50 years to build and wasn’t yet complete. You can imagine the Twelve staring like open-mouthed little boys at the immense and beautiful temple stones, some weighting over 40 tons. Magnificent pieces of artwork had been dedicated to the temple and adorned the worship area. Don’t we take pride, in a healthy way, in our own more humble house of God? As the disciples took in the far more impressive Jerusalem temple, maybe Psalm 84 rolled off their lips, *“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord.”* (1-2). That was Jesus’ disciples on this happy day.

 In the midst of their child-like wonder then Jesus said it, ***“As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.”*** What could possibly make Jesus smash the mood of the moment like that? Are the disciples not allowed to be happy? Well, we can’t tell what was in the disciples’ hearts, but Jesus’ understanding of human nature, and his knowledge of the future all lead him to pull up short his disciples—Peter, James and John & Co… and us disciples too.

 Why does Jesus go off and make such gloomy predictions? Why talk about the temple’s destruction?

 It was not like the Jerusalem temple was somehow an offense to God. Jesus had been consecrated in that temple according to the Law of Moses at 40 days old. At twelve years of age he had called that same temple *“my Father’s house.”* As an adult consumed with holy anger, Jesus had cleansed that temple, chasing out the marketeers who had turned God’s place of worship into a livestock market. But something was about to change. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knew that the *future* of his people could not be tied to that temple. Three days after this reading, Jesus would sacrifice himself on a cross. He would establish a new covenant. The significance of the temple would fade. No longer could sacrifice for sin legitimately be offered in that temple. No! Jesus’ one time for all sacrifice on Calvary would be sufficient. And so, within a few short years, in God’s providence—not contrary to his providence, but in his providence —that temple would be destroyed so that no one would ever be confused about the right path: whether the Old Covenant tied to the temple, or the New Covenant tied to Christ Jesus.

 Well, so much for Jesus’ predictions about the temple. Why does Jesus go on about the bad things that would happen to his follower, the whole ***“they will lay hands on you and persecute you”*** thing?

 Jesus is letting his disciples know that not then, nor as long as this earth endures, will there ever be some sort of Golden Age of Christianity upon earth. He wants us to know that as long as this earth endures wars will continue, false prophets will pop up like whack-a-moles, and worldly people around God’s people will look kind of funny at them waiting for the right time to do worse than just look kind of funny at them. There will be external dangers for God’s holy people and internal dangers. And it will all stem from their connection to the name of Jesus.

 We, Christ’s people, should not be surprised that these things happen. We should not think that the world is out of God’s control. We should not be deceived by fine-sounding arguments that make God’s ways seem outdated and simplistic. We should never assume that God’s promises to take care of us mean that life is going to be easy for God’s people. But most of all, we should listen to the last words, Christ’s promise echoing through the ages: ***“By standing firm you will gain life.”***

 Jesus’ disciples of all times need to know all that. Because whether you are a thirty year old Galilean fisherman awed by God’s temple, or a first-grader in Sunday School singing, “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine,” it’s easy to think that God’s people really shouldn’t have to bear the brunt of living in a fallen world. Yet we do. If we aren’t aware of that—if we think that life with God should be a bed of roses—we will get ambushed by the evil things that happen. We may even find ourselves saying things like “I don’t know if I can believe in God.” Or, “How can a loving God let \_\_\_\_ happen?” Those are terrible words to hear from a Christian. Those words doubt God. They speak from unbelief. They are terrible sin because they openly question God. But they get thought and spoken by Christians when Christians have the wrong expectations of what God has promised us in this world.

 The hymn we just sang, hymn 865, was definitely an oldie. I don’t think too many would call it an oldie-but-goodie. I don’t think we’ve sung it even once in the nearly eight years I’ve been here. That hymn sang the realities of God’s people living in a fallen world, which is probably why it’s not sung more. Maybe you saw the section headings above that hymn, “Church Militant.” Do you know what that means?

 “Church Militant” does *not* mean that Christians are supposed to take up arms in the name of Jesus. You know that. And I know that you know that. The phrase “Church Militant” contains exactly what Jesus described in our reading: ***“They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons… You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish.”***

 Church Militant means that we Christians, as long as we are here on this earth, will be under spiritual attack. Anyone who thinks otherwise is naïve and ripe pickings for the devil. Jesus wants none of us to imagine that following him is supposed to make everything wonderful and that the world around us is going to listen and say in open admiration, “Wow, I’m so glad you shared that!” We are not yet the Church Triumphant. That will happen in heaven when all evil will forever be removed from Christ’s people and we will live in God’s presence forever. But for now, we are the Church Militant; we are God’s people in daily spiritual warfare with the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

 Ask students who go to public universities. Nearly every single one of them has had or at least known of a professor who thought it is his place to do the work of Satan and get young Christians to renounce their faith. What evil work done by an evil person! Here, in Luke 21, Jesus prepares those young adults before they even register for college.

 Ask people who work on the floor of a plant, surrounded by others who don’t mind sharing all the sordid stories of their openly sinful life. Those co-workers think it strange the Christian doesn’t join in. They try to pressure, sweet-talk, and shame a believer into those ways. And if he should make an issue of it and direct them to another way of life in their Savior—well, I really don’t know what would happen. In Luke 21, Jesus would get you ready for that even before your fill out the work application.

 A couple months ago my wife and I went to a movie at a movie festival up in Louisville—PG rated I assure you (*Memoria*). Only time we’ve ever gone to a movie festival. I didn’t conduct a poll, but the movie festival crowd didn’t seem a staunchly Christian crowd. Anyway, in that movie a woman is dealing with depression after the death of her husband. At one point she visits a doctor for treatment. Instead of instantly prescribing her patient chemical medication, the doctor very gently—and I cannot stress that enough—very gently, a single time, suggests that perhaps this woman can find spiritual relief in Jesus. You should have heard the guffaws and the “how dare she”s from the audience! A single instance of the name Jesus in a more than two hour movie sure got them riled up! Oh, how they hated the very mention of Jesus’ name! Lisa and I were caught off guard. We would not have been surprised if we had remembered Jesus’ words in Luke 21, ***“All men will hate you because of me.”***

 In spite of all that, you should never feel sorry for yourself. Don’t think, “Poor us. We Christians get treated so unfairly.” If you really understand what Jesus has given you, you can not have a pity party. You have so much more than the world can ever take from you. It’s like the aged Apostle Peter would one day write, *“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed”*(1 Peter 4:12). We will be vindicated!

 But for now, you do need to know that we will experience spiritual warfare. You need to be ready for it. It is dangerous if you don’t stand firm.

 The last words of Jesus in our reading tell us the mindset we need: ***“By standing firm you will gain life.”*** Christ would have us think like determined soldiers defending a critical position. The position is so valuable that we are under orders not to retreat under any circumstances, even to the loss of life because that would bring worse than loss of life. But in maintaining that position up to death, we don’t die but gain life. ***“By standing firm you will gain life,”*** is Jesus’ promise.

 In a similar way the Apostle Paul commanded Christians, *“Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”* Put on that full battle gear. Regularly feed your faith with the Word of God and the sacrament of Holy Communion. Remember God’s blessed adoption in Baptism. Thinking about God, talk about God, and read about God, pray to God. That will steel us for spiritual combat. That will continue us strong in the gifts God has given through faith in Christ Jesus.

 Stand firm in Christ, that you may gain life! Amen.