

Pentecost 26, Proper 28
Luke 21:5-19

The Rev Leslie Nunez Steffensen
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Have you ever had the experience of stepping for the first time into one of the world's great cathedrals? The first thing you do is look up at the massive stonework and arches. The altars are usually surrounded by incredibly precious carvings, statues, and paintings. The people who built those cathedrals put the best of what they had into them. They are prayers that lift upward to the sky – getting as close to heaven as architecture of their times could allow. I always feel like in the presence of the holy: the thousands of faithful feet that have walked on those stones, the millions of prayers that have been lifted up to God in that space – they make me feel a part of something bigger than just me. I feel the power of the Church and its stability in those buildings that seem to defy gravity. The Second Temple in Jerusalem was King Herod's attempt to establish a grand statement of faith, a showcase of power. The construction of grand plazas and walls around the small original Temple site was for the world to acknowledge the power of God and the special relationship with the Jewish people. A soliloquy from a Yiddish play conveys a sense of what the Jewish throngs worshipping at the Temple in Jerusalem must have experienced in Jesus's day: the rabbi character says, "God's world is great and holy. The holiest land in the world is the land of Israel. In the land of Israel the holiest city is Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the holiest place was the Temple, and in the Temple the holiest spot was the Holy of Holies...." The Temple was the geographic location where God dwelt on earth, where humankind met God. (Jewishvirtuallibrary.org) In Jesus' time, the Temple was the one most sacred places on earth, the one place on earth where somehow heaven and earth met...The Temple as an institution, its values and the structure, played a very important role in the society and in the psyche of the Jewish people at large. In

Luke's Gospel, by chapter 21 events are moving quickly toward Jesus' crucifixion. We feel the tension mounting as "Jesus walks a fine line of that keeps him just short of open defiance and indictable offense." This is especially true in our reading for today. The disciples marvel at the Temple – its grandeur and beauty and in response, Jesus tells them, "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." That is a dangerous and stunning thing to say at the very walls of the Temple. Was he prophesying or was he advocating action? What would it mean for the Temple and all its glory to be "thrown down?" The disciples would have been shocked and deeply upset at Jesus' words - that this symbol of connection to God might be destroyed. It would mean chaos.

How does it feel when you think about something you take as the center of your very cultural life and spiritual life – a cathedral, or for our community we might think of Grace Church or Shrine Mont even, and then think about it being utterly destroyed – all of the buildings. All of the community and life that surrounds it blown away and the people scattered and the whole institution wiped from the face of the earth? It seems unimaginable. It would be chaos. This week has felt that way for half of the people in the United States. We are in a nation that is in crisis. Our foundations have been shaken and there is concern for the future of our nation and its government. I have felt this week like I was in the middle of a massive "Telephone Game." The person in the center began a message at the top of one line and then again at a second line. As the message went from person to person down each line, it changed. When I got the message and as the last person, shouted out what I heard, there was a shocked look from the person who reported what they heard at the end of their line. I had heard atrocious language and unconscionable hateful words, a threat of all I hold dear. The guy at the end of line #2 heard a whisper of some things he may not agree with, but mostly he got a message of hope and possibilities for radical change, of rescue and re-building. These are extremely different points of view about the same message and people are reacting on a wide spectrum to the outcome of the presidential election. The people in line #2 in our telephone game have had their communities destroyed. Especially the people from what are being called the "Brexit States," the regions where the industries and institutions that once supported thriving communities have been laid waste and no help has come for them. They have felt abandoned by the rest of us. They feel like they are living in chaos. In line #1, we now feel that our communities are under threat: our children, our neighbors, our very bodies are now feeling vulnerable to utter devastation. We are under the threat of chaos.

Jesus was a radical in his time and is still one in our time. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus "confronts the Authorities and their values one last time" in Jerusalem as he makes his way to the cross. Jesus "predicts the downfall of the

powerful.” (Sharon H. Ringe, “Luke’s Gospel” in *The New Testament: Introducing the Way of Discipleship.*) His words scared his own disciples. “They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” And he told them, “Beware that you are not led astray...”When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified...”Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes...” famines and plagues. In other words, we followers of Jesus Christ cannot trust governments, rulers of this world, we cannot trust even the ground under our feet, the climate, or the air we breathe. We cannot even trust our relations. Jesus said, “You will be hated by all because of my name.” What Jesus was saying wasn’t a threat to the Temple – he was talking about a new relationship with God, a new Temple that didn’t require stone walls and beautiful furnishings. Jesus was the Temple, He was God made man, dwelling among us. He was God’s presence. The destruction, the crucifixion of that body so that God could be with each of us - THAT is the Temple Jesus was talking about – the Temple in Jerusalem with its power and beauty simply would not matter anymore. The disciples shouldn’t have been terrified by this news that the stones would be thrown down, they should have been dancing with joy. Jesus told them that the chaos to come “will give you an opportunity to testify...I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.” What was the testimony that their opponents could not withstand? That the world and its powers could not contradict? What was it about Jesus’ name that spread the gospel like wild fire throughout the ancient world and toppled empires? What is it about His name that will cause us to be hated and scorned and reviled? It was and is HIS Love. Pure, unbridled, free, forgiving, uncompromising love.

As followers of Christ, we have way more in common than what appears to divide us. First, we are each adored by God. All of us. Secondly, we have LOVE. We follow Christ and to prove it, we testify: we love our neighbors as ourselves. Our hope is not in the institutions that will fail us, the governments that rise and fall, the political parties that would wish us to revile one another. The very earth that we think hold us up – it will shake, it will burn, it will dry up or flood. But while some lose hope, the faithful get to work. Our hope is in the Christ-like love that we show to one another. The faithful reach out to help one another and their neighbor to regain their footing. Are you one who wanted change for the possibility for a turn-around in the economy – for more jobs and work for people? Then get out there and advocate for industry and small businesses. GET to WORK. Be the light of Christ where there has been darkness and hopelessness. Extend opportunities to all to join in the rebuilding of our economically devastated areas to all who want to work hard with you: all colors, all religions, and those who have come to our shore seeking opportunities to work hard for a better life – who want what you want. Did you vote for security? Love your neighbor. The home-grown terrorists have been people who felt isolated and disenfranchised. Befriend your neighbors. Get to know their teenagers, get to know their story what are their hopes for the future? What are their struggles? Help them navigate this culture that appears to reject them. Be the light of Christ to them. Are you worried for your neighbors who are Latino immigrants? Who are Muslim? Who are gay or transgendered? Then get out there and advocate for their safety, their full-inclusion in civic life, their freedom to pursue happiness in this country. Teach your children to stand up to bullies for themselves and for others – model that for them. Be the light of Christ, welcoming the stranger where there may have been darkness and fear, protecting those who are vulnerable: the widow, the orphan, the imprisoned.

No party or candidate or president is going to fix the world for us. That has never been true and never will be. When we as a nation have been at our best was when we drew together and worked hard to build, when we united our voices and votes to advocate to change laws, when we have served together to defend our freedoms. God is present and working through us. Whatever it is that you fear for our economy, our nation, or for the future: hear Jesus tell you, “do not be terrified.” We have no need to feel terrified. There is no Temple, no one location for God’s Holy Presence anymore. God’s dwelling place is in our hearts. When the world seems hopeless, we have an opportunity to testify in Christ’s name. We have an opportunity to testify – to stand in contrast to chaos, hopelessness, hateful words, to division, to fear, to violence.

We are the Temples; we defy the laws of gravity that would throw us down and we soar. We carry Jesus’ crazy, outrageous offer of unbridled love and healing forgiveness to the world together. The harder the world gets, the more OPPORTUNITY we have to testify, to shine Christ’s love. Amen.