

version 2

This passage of scripture is in the genre called apocalyptic. Probably the best known example of apocalyptic is the book of Revelations. Wherever it is found, apocalyptic speaks about the end times – a vast conflagration, earth’s self-destruction. This genre involves signs to be aware of, and calamities to prepare for. There are other accounts like this one in Luke. Both Matthew and Mark have similar passages. AND every year one of the three is read on this Sunday – the next to last Sunday of the church year. The end times are described in more lurid detail in the rest of this chapter of Luke - but the lectionary folk have spared us the worst. I don’t know about you, but earthquakes and plagues and wars and famine are enough for me to get Luke’s message: the end times will not be fun.

In studying this passage it is helpful to rearrange it. Like the disciples, I wanted to know what happens when. Jesus talks about the destruction of the temple and the city, but he warns that before that happens the disciples will be arrested and have an opportunity to witness. And after those two things happen, then there will be the coming of the End Times. So in order, it’s the disciples opportunity to witness, then the destruction of the temple and finally, the End Times. In whatever order events occur, there is destruction and calamity to come - war, famine, plagues, earthquakes, insurrections. That’s the End Times.

It must have been difficult for the disciples to wrap their heads around Jesus’ predictions - especially as they stand there facing the magnificence of the temple. And it was quite a sight.

Josephus, a contemporary historian said that if you have not

seen Herod's temple you cannot say you have seen a beautiful temple. No one had ever seen such a soaring monument. It had gleaming marble pillars that dwarfed mere humans – each pillar was 25 cubits, 37 feet in height - a first century skyscraper. Looking at it and hearing that it will not stand, not even one stone upon another, the disciples are in shock. They can barely collect themselves to ask “when this will happen?”, and “what should we look for?”

In the first place, Jesus warns, don't pay any attention to those false prophets, pretending to be from me. They will try to get you to follow them. Do not be led astray. And, don't be distracted by the wars and earthquakes and the rest. Do not let yourselves be terrified.

Before any of that can happen Jesus tells the disciples, there is a role they are to play in this chaotic and calamitous time. They will be arrested, imprisoned, and brought before, tried by, Kings and Governors. They will have the opportunity to testify.

We don't know the factual details of Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple - as I said it's in Mark and Matthew as well. But Luke wrote his gospel sometime around 85 a.d. knowing full well that the Temple had been destroyed by the Roman Army in 70 a.d. Luke's highlighting Jesus' foreknowledge wasn't about Jesus as much as it was about the people of God living in Luke's time. Luke's intention was to make meaning out of the destruction of the temple, to comment upon it in the person of Christ. Eyewitnesses to the destruction of the temple report that the cracking of vast stones and wooden beams made a sound like thunder." "You would

have thought the Temple hill was boiling over from its base, being everywhere one mass of flame." The temple was dismantled. The remnants were everywhere.

Luke's readers were living in an occupied Jerusalem. Roman centurions patrolled the streets - for the Jews there was no escape from the evidence of their failure. Daily life was lived surrounded by the ruins of their temple and their city. They had to pick their way through the rubble to go from one side of Jerusalem to the other. There was no way to avoid this devastating loss – it sat there in their midst mocking Israel's dream of peace.

When writing his gospel Luke brings Jesus before the temple in its days of glory so that Jesus can remind us that there is a choice between what **seems** permanent - marble and massive stones; what seems valuable gold and silver, AND what really is permanent, eternal and what is really valuable. Yes, they have been defeated by the Romans but the Disciples' testimony - the truth that has lived on is eternal and cannot be destroyed by armies and fire.

The disciples chose to live by and in the love of Jesus. They knew that dire things were happening, that arrest, persecution, possible death, loom on the horizon for them. But they, assured of Jesus' presence, trusting they would be given the words to speak, they were able to see God at work all around them; they trusted Jesus' promise. He gave them the words they needed so that their testimony was sincere, impassioned, and effective. Jesus has warned the disciples about those who will try to lead them astray. He has put the signs and portents in perspective.

Do not be terrified when you hear of wars and earthquakes and famine. Do not let these things distract you. Your mission, your role is to stand in the midst of fear, to feel the dread of coming destruction and to point to the Word and the Work of God, the savior Jesus Christ and his promise. Not the promise of an easy life, nor of being whisked away to glory, but the promise of Christ's presence. His is the promise to be with them, with us, in the middle of crises, beyond the coming destruction of the temple; promises that enabled the disciples to speak with passion and commitment before the King, the Governor. Their testimony is allegiance to Jesus Christ. They are not afraid. You will not be harmed because your worship is not of a building, or an administration or a reign you will be kept safe – not a hair on your head will be harmed.

This is what Christians do. This is who Christians are. This is who we are. This is how Christians see - Jesus says as for the things that we see - massive stones and gleaming columns. As for what looks so permanent, that will be destroyed. But what looks weak, powerless, defeated - that will endure and it has. His disciples, Christians, you and I, we see things differently. We look with the eyes of faith. We know we are wrapped in God's Grace. We look for it and we find it.

When it appears things are on the precipice of destruction, it is not the calamities that we focus on, it is the evidence of God's presence, the experience of God's faithfulness. Christians see with the vision of Faith. The disciples handed over and dragged before the King and the Governor to justify their allegiance to Jesus - they speak so strongly that no one can challenge them. They are speaking for God, they are relying on Jesus' promise. .

We too are called on to testify, to point to God's work in the world - to shine light on love and hope. If you see something, say something.

That was, is, the work of Christians. The disciples, Jesus says, were not deluded by the glories of the temple, nor distracted by false prophets. The world admires massive buildings adorned with precious metals. Jesus calls his disciples to admire those who speak for him, those who rest in the knowledge, in the certainty of God's love even when the situation looks hopeless.

Followers of Christ see the world differently, intentionally looking for God's promises being fulfilled. It isn't a judgment on wealth or grandeur, it is testimony, it is what we see because we are God's people, because we proclaim Jesus' name. Once you've heard Jesus speak your name, you can no longer let despair have the last word. Once you've looked with Jesus' eyes, you can no longer pretend you don't see the suffering and the outcast. Once you've experienced Jesus' love, earthly magnificence pales. Having Jesus by your side, strengthening you, giving you words, you know he is always with you, always at work - even in the midst of destruction and catastrophe.

Those who follow Christ, the disciples, we disciples look for and find God's work in the world. We are here in a Christian community - in large part because those disciples testified, because those who came before us spoke of God's power and God's will. And, being here in a Christian community we are surrounded by concrete examples of God's goodness. Turn and look around you, look at your neighbor - see how good God is. This, these, you, we, the people of God, the lovers of Jesus are

the hope when the world seems dark. I see the light in you, now. Jesus saw the light in his disciples, then. He promised to be with them, and he was. He promises to be with us, and he is.