

Luke 21:5-19

This morning we gather in this Temple, to be in God's presence, to hear God's Word, to let the Holy Spirit work in through this Word, to change us into the people that He calls us to be. As Children of God we belong to Him. Belonging to Him informs our life, how we use our time, our talents, and our financial resources for the work of the ministry, not only in this place, also for the rest of the week.

Most of us have received the letter with the commitment card and you have it filled out. We have heard Rich's Temple talk. And if you have been paying attention, you have guessed it is stewardship commitment Sunday.

When most of us think of stewardship our attention turns to money. Many say, "All the church talks about is money and its need for it?" Sometime back I saw this bumper sticker, "Money Talks, All Mines says is Good-bye." That is quite a sad commentary on Money. In response let me just say that a good many of Jesus' teachings had to do with money and possessions and how we use them in our life. Jesus would not talk about things if they were not close to our hearts. Jesus knows our hearts and He knows money is close to our hearts and Jesus is the foremost heart specialist. Jesus' love changes hearts!!! And he is here again to change your heart and mine too!

In our gospel for today Jesus is teaching in the temple. Many people are present listening and hanging on His life-giving and heart changing words. And teaching we hear today coming from Jesus lips sounds like bad news to a reasonable person on this stewardship and commitment Sunday. If all coming to an end, then what's the point. He is speaking of the Magnificent Temple's destruction. Not one stone will be left, one upon another. One of the listeners asks, "When will this happen?" We want to know. It seems that knowing gives any of us a sense of control. All Jesus gives are signs like,

+Bad preaching, false teachers, and preachers claiming they have this inside knowledge, and even some claiming to be the Messiah. Don't be led astray,

+Turmoil in the world. Wars and insurrections. Nations rising against nations.

+A World filled of natural disasters and famines.

+Then a persecution will take place. From afar we will hear of it. We will think of the persecution in a general sense. But it will get worse. It will get personal. Family members will be turning their relatives in for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus. "You will be hated for My name's sake."

+Next comes the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple with all its beautiful and noble stones. Jerusalem will be surrounded by the enemies and if you can run for the hills, do it! If you can't run, woe to you.

+People will be arrested; people will fall by the edge of the sword.

It appears the world the world Will be coming apart at the seams. you will see signs in the moon and stars, on earth great tidal waves, and other disasters. The powers of Heavens will be shaken. People will be fainting from fear and foreboding.

Now you may be wondering, if I am a believer in Jesus as my savior, will get spared of all this? Do I as a believe in Jesus get pass and the nonbelievers will go through these bad events? NO free pass for believers. This affect us as well as the nonbelievers. And to add more bad news to all this, believers “will be hated for my name’s sake,” says Jesus to us believers.

Will the good news, some of these events have happened. The Romans did surround Jerusalem and cutting off food and water from the people. The City was destroyed, and the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

Still much of the bad news continues to this day. Earthquakes and Storms and disasters, as well as false preachers and teachers leading many astray. What has not happened is that Jesus has not returned in the clouds with power and glory. We still are waiting for his return.

In light of all this it would be easy to forget Stewardship Commitment Sunday and just wait idly until he comes. But the problem with that is Jesus never gave us a time when that would happen.

Before theses words we heard this morning, Jesus is watching the offering procession and how all the people are putting their offerings in the offering box. Rich people are putting in large sums of money and as the money is landing in the box, I imagine there is a loud clanging sound of the coins as they are being dropped. Then comes a poor widow and she drops in two pennies hardly making a sound as they land in the box. And Jesus calls the people to look at her. She has given her life, all she had to live on. The rich have given out of their abundance but she out of her poverty. She give her whole life.

As Jesus is saying this, I can't help but to believe that Jesus is thinking of the widow who just gave everything she had to live on and the life that he Himself will give for the life of the world. His whole life he will give on the cross for our salvation, for the forgiveness of sins. The life that he will give to restore our relationship with God. The life that he will give will be raised from the dead to be the new temple for the people of God to turn to. Then Jesus turns to point to that time of His second coming and the signs that point to it.

Wars and rumors of war, family against family member, all because of this gospel of God. About false teachers and preachers and persecutions. This stuff has happened in every generation, and it continues to happen even today.

Jesus says, The end will come, but not at once. It will be a time of the end of waiting and beginning of the fulfillment. Then Jesus says by your endurance you will gain your lives. So, what is Jesus meaning by all that? By your endurance is your waiting but be assured this not idle waiting. St. Paul lived as he was expecting Jesus return any day. So, what does Paul do, he preaches the gospel, he brings the people to hope. Even in these times where there are wars and rumors of war, where being a Christian is met with persecutions throughout this world, but for us maybe indifference.

As we approach our commitment for the coming year, we are not to be idle, sitting around doing nothing and awaiting the end. Someone asked Martin Luther what He would do if he knew for sure if Jesus was returning tomorrow, what he would do. Martin replied, "I would go in my back yard and plant a tree." Whether Luther said any of this or not, it does point us to that we are to be active in living out our lives. We are to be about the ministry that God has given us. Remember God has given you a life that will not be taken away from us. Jesus gave all so that we can have life in His name and have it abundantly. We have hope even in difficult times and in the challenges of ministry. "Not a hair will perish. By your endurance you will gain your life."

So, as the offering and commitment cards are collected, does your money say goodbye. Or do you see the money given and committed in the coming year to provide for the life-giving, heart changing proclamation of the gospel in this world that is so full of bad news. To provide a place that was built to honor of God, to worship and give thanksgiving and worship to Jesus for all he has done for you. To provide for materials to teach and grow in God's love, not only for our children, but for grownups as well. To provide and equip us all with the hope that lives in us to give witness to this hope so that God can change the lives in this community. To provide support for missionaries in places where the gospel needs to be preached to build the Kingdom before he comes again.

Even though we know that wars and rumors of war will increase, we continue to work and pray for the peace and safety for all in society. Even though we know earthquakes, hurricanes and pestilences will continue, the church's disaster relief ministries like LWR, the NALC Domestic Disaster relief move in to provide supplies to clean up and to rebuild beautiful buildings that have been destroyed, to bring food and medicine to the hungry and diseased. Our financial Gifts make a difference in this world through our committed benevolences.

Even in these last days, we live in the present time as we await the end time. Here today, in this Temple built of stone our hearts and our hands are stretched out to take and hang on His every Word. When you see all this occurring look up for your redemption is drawing near.

IN Jesus Name. Amen.