

November 14 2010 Sermon

Luke 21:5-28

5 And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said,

6 "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

7 And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

8 And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them.

9 And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once."

10 Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

11 There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

12 But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.

13 This will be your opportunity to bear witness.

14 Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer,

15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

16 You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death.

17 You will be hated by all for my name's sake.

18 But not a hair of your head will perish.

19 By your endurance you will gain your lives.

20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.

21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it,

22 for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.

23 Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people.

24 They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

25 "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves,

26 people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

They were shocked! It was a rude thing to say, at best. At worst, it might have been a threat. Imagine you are visiting one of the most magnificent cathedrals in Europe; filled with gold, hand carved wood trim, statutes, adorned like a palace; an architectural wonder of the world. You are standing there in awe, admiring one of the most beautiful buildings ever built, when another tourist comes up and shouts out in front of the crowds, "This building you are admiring and adoring will soon be completely destroyed. Not one stone left upon another."

Or suppose it happened right here in our church today. We would consider it a threat and probably have that person carried off by the police.

Was Jesus a terrorist, planning to attack the temple? Was he a lunatic spewing out nonsense? Was he trying to shock the people who had come to Jerusalem from around the world to celebrate the Passover?

No, indeed, he was the temple, himself, in the flesh. The temple is the dwelling place of God on earth, among his people. Jesus was announcing that now He had become the fleshly dwelling place of God. The old temple made of stones was no longer needed. God's purpose for it had come to an end. God was done with it and would tear it down. And that's exactly what happened in the year 70 a.d., a mere 35 years later. Not one stone was left standing upon another. In fact, Roman armies invaded and burned the entire city of Jerusalem to the ground.

Just the day before, Jesus had predicted that they would tear down the temple and he would raise it up in three days. He was talking about his own body being hung on a cross; the new temple, but also making a subtle prophecy of the fate of the temple built with stone. Not one stone would be left standing, still, Jesus himself was the stone the builders rejected and is now the cornerstone of the new

temple, his church. Not even Jesus, the rock of our salvation, was exempt from being tossed down on the cross. But Jesus was raised up to become the chief stone, the cornerstone of the new temple. He was raised to be the rock of your salvation, the rock of refuge, cleft for you.

The Old Testament institutions of temple, priesthood and sacrifices are now fulfilled. Jesus himself is the temple. Jesus is the high priest. Jesus is the lamb of sacrifice. These Old Testament institutions were but copies of the true, heavenly reality. Jesus is the reality. For in the flesh and blood of Jesus, God dwells bodily on earth.

Today Jesus is our high priest, acting on our behalf, pleading for us, not in buildings made with human hands, but in heaven itself, at the very throne of God. Jesus is the high priest of the good things that have come. He has entered the holy places, and has secured your eternal redemption, not with the blood of bulls or goats but with the precious blood of God himself. Jesus himself is the sacrifice, the burnt offering, the Lamb that takes away your sin. The blood of goats and lambs doesn't forgive sin, but the very blood of God does! It was God's blood that was sacrificed for you on a cross.

Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. He has fulfilled and superseded the copies made with human hands, and is himself the true reality. Today He is in the presence of God pleading your case before the throne, on your behalf.

That is why the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. It was no longer needed in God's plan for your salvation. And that is the way with all material things. We have been placed as stewards of God's things. Nothing in this earth belongs to us. Yes, that's a fact. Not even the house you own or the property it sits on. It all belongs to God. God makes this very clear when he commanded the Israelite people that every fifty years they had to return any property they bought to its original owners. "'The land is mine,' says the Lord." "All property, all possession, all nations, all peoples and races are mine, declares God. They belong to me!"

That is the principle of stewardship which we look at on this stewardship Sunday. It all belongs to God. Whatever you have, possess, even your intellect, skills, abilities, bank account, home and property. Yes, even this church building and its properties. It all belongs to God. And it all must be used for God's purposes only. It is not for your pleasure or delight. It is not to be kept as a museum, or selfishly hung on to. That is what the servants did who were given the talents by the king. When the king returned and he called them to make an account of their talents, one had multiplied his 10 fold. Another 5 fold. But the last one, had simply hidden his in the ground, and did not put it to use. The king was furious. He took away that man's talent and cast him out into eternal punishment and fire.

The things of God are to be used to build and extend his kingdom, not for our pleasure, not for our pride, not to show off our power. All things are God's things. That is the basis of stewardship. A steward does not own anything, he is only a caretaker who does with them what the owner wishes done. And what is no longer being used for the kingdom, God will take away; and what God has no use for any longer, will be removed, just as he destroyed the temple and burned down Jerusalem when its purpose had been fulfilled.

But not only does God own all things, money, and resources. He owns you! He owns all people! He is your creator. He formed you with his own hands. He wove you together in your mother's womb. You are his work of art. You are his prized possession. Therefore stewardship is when you live according to God's wishes and desires. He is absolute and unchallengeable. Your life and all you do are his.

And you belong to God because he bought you. Yes, he purchased you with his own blood. He took you from the grasp of sin and death, from the devil's power and kingdom, and he made you his own. On the cross he paid for you. He redeemed you; you became his.

In Baptism he grabbed hold of you and placed his name on you. You are his prized possession which he acquired at great cost: the life of his Son. And he will not let go of you. He will not give you up.

Why do you fear soul? Why are you troubled? Through all sufferings, all persecutions, all afflictions in your life he will never let go of you. Here He describes wars and tumults. He talks about nations and kingdoms rising up against each other. He talks about earthquakes and famines and pestilences. He talks about terrors and great signs in heaven. He talks about persecutions. You may even be delivered up to magistrates, judges, governors and kings, but he will not let you out of his hand. You may be put to death but you are still his. In the distresses of life you are in his hands. "Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

You have all ravaged your lives. You have ravaged the lives of others. By your sin you have torn down yourselves and those around you. You may be broken, downtrodden, fallen apart, but you are still God's possession. God calls you his own. And God cannot and will not forsake or abandon you. You may be hated by all for his name's sake, but not a hair of your head will perish.

So when you see the world around you crumbling; when men are fainting in fear; when the powers of heaven are shaken; then straighten up, raise up your heads, the Son of Man will come to you with power and great glory. He has sworn his allegiance to you as his Baptized child. He cannot break his promise. He cannot lie.

He promised to come. He comes to you in the Word preached. He comes to you in the Sacrament of the Altar. He comes to you in his flesh and blood in Communion. He is the new temple, he is the priest, he is the sacrifice. His very body which is the fleshly dwelling place of God in today's world is the very same body you eat in Holy Communion. This temple of God enters into you so that you, joined to Christ and united with him, are now the dwelling place of God. His living flesh enlivens you. You, having been baptized and having received his body and blood in communion, are the living embodiment of God in the world.

Therefore, stand up tall, oh soul. Lift up your heads, dear child. You will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds. You will see him coming in the water of Baptism. You will see him coming in the bread and wine of Communion. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's promise will not. God's children will stand on the last day. Know, then, that whatever happens, whatever mess your life has

become, whatever trial and sorrow afflicts you, know that the kingdom of God is near. As near as his Word; as near as his Sacraments.

Amen.