

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Luke 21:5-19

⁵ When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ⁶ "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."

⁷ They asked him, "Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?" ⁸ And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do not go after them."

⁹ "When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately." 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 plagues, and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven."

¹² "But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. ¹³ This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴ So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, ¹⁵ for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your souls."

Two hunters were out hunting and came upon what appeared at first as an abandoned farm. The barn was sagging; the house was in disrepair; and there were junk cars and car parts lying around. The only thing that made it a working farm were a few chickens pecking away and a goat wandering around.

As they entered the yard, they came across an old well.

One asked the other "Wonder how deep it is."

The other said, "We'll have to drop something down and listen for the splash."

They looked around for something to drop down the well, but the only thing close by was an old transmission. They both hauled it over to the well and dropped it in. They counted and waited a long time for the splash. It was a deep, deep one all right.

They turned to leave and saw the goat was charging at them, head down, horns headed straight for them. At the last moment they jumped aside, and the goat went right past them and straight over the side and down the well. They looked at each other in amazement.

As they started to leave, the owner of the farm came up. They chatted for a moment and got permission to hunt on his land. The farmer asked, "Have you seen my goat?"

They said, "Your goat almost killed us charging at us. You should have had that goat tied up."

The farmer, "I thought I had him tied up to an old transmission."

LESSON: You follow what you're tied to.

What information and teachings are you tied to? What is the foundation for that on which you organize and plan your life? Do you gravitate towards the voices calling out to you with

temptations that satisfy your desires for prosperity, and ease? Or do you use the words of Jesus to build your life upon and guide you—even when turmoil erupts in your life path. Jesus' message from today's text is a wake-up call for all people, and should be taken seriously—today, not tomorrow—for time is of the essence.

Our text from Luke begins by telling us that Jesus was talking with followers—not just his disciples—at the beautifully adorned rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. The original Temple had been destroyed in 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, when he conquered Jerusalem.

Darrell Bock, in his commentary of Luke describes the following about the rebuilding of the temple project. "It had recently been restored by Herod the Great. The workmanship was of excellent quality. It had taken eighty years to complete and included new foundation walls on which Herod had significantly enlarged the temple.

"Sparing no expense, he had employed the most talented artisans to use the best materials for the project such as white marble that was up to sixty-seven feet long, twelve feet high and twelve feet wide. Blue, scarlet, and purple Babylonian tapestries made of fine linen formed a veil at the entrance. He had installed gold and silver-plated gates and gold-plated doors throughout."

On this day, the people were admiring its stones and the gifts that had been dedicated to God, and why wouldn't they? The Temple was beautiful. Much to their dismay, then, Jesus told them that the beautiful Temple would soon be destroyed. The people probably wondered, "How could that be possible?"

As unthinkable as this may have been for them, Jesus' followers did not ask him **how** he knew about the temple's forthcoming destruction or how it would happen. They only asked Jesus **when** the destruction would happen. The followers didn't challenge what Jesus said; they accepted it which demonstrates that they wholeheartedly believed that Jesus was sent by God. Therefore, if Jesus said the temple was going to be destroyed, they believed it would happen. But "when?" is all they wanted to know.

It's like, they were already thinking, "What time is it now? And how close are we to the time this will happen? In his response, Jesus does not tell them when this will all happen. Instead, he said something like, "What time is it?" He doesn't give them a day or time. Instead, he warns them that it's time to be cautious of religious impostors. It's time to be aware that things could get hazardous for a while. It's time to remember that our lives are in the hands of God. It's time to remember that nothing can separate us from God's love." He goes on then to assure them that a day will come when he returns. He redirects their focus towards a more important question: "What will you do in the meantime?"

Last Sunday, we talked a bit about the return of Jesus; and we reminded ourselves that nobody knows when this will happen. Instead, like those Jesus spoke to that day long ago, we should be asking, what should we be doing in the meantime as we wait for Christ's return. What should we be doing to guard ourselves against being deceived by false teachers and prophets? What should we be doing to build our endurance for facing the uncertain and troubling times ahead for us? What will we do to keep ourselves tied to God?

Jesus tells us numerous times, not only in today's scripture, but it is also time to be disciplined in nurturing our spiritual health. Ask yourself, do I spend enough time reading and studying the Word of God? Do I take time to pray to God, and to listen for His voice? Do I give time to praise and worship God, not just on Sunday mornings, but also throughout the week? In other words, am I taking time to strengthen and to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ on

which my life stands? If so, we will be better equipped to navigate the tumultuous waters we have yet to face.

One commentator, after commending any preacher who speaks from this difficult text, said, that if the preacher spoke on spiritual disciplines, the congregation would be bored and unsatisfied. He said congregations would rather hear about the end times and theories about what will transpire. That's what will get the congregation excited.

The commentator was not suggesting preachers do that. I agree. In my understanding of God's Word, if we can't discuss disciplines, if we don't practice spiritual disciplines, we might as well not talk about the end times and Christ's return. A lack of interest in caring for one's spiritual care and growth in relation to God, indicates one's insincere commitment and belief in Jesus and in the significance in Jesus' return. It discloses what one's heart is truly tied to—meaning either this world or God's Kingdom.

Jesus warns us that spiritual discipline keeps us on the path of righteousness while we navigate our way through whatever is to come while we await Jesus's return, whether it be on that day when we take our last breath in the world as we know it now, or at a time that we call the end times. Knowledge alone will not prepare us for that day.

Is what the commentator suggests true? Are many Christians disinterested in or don't take seriously Christ's warning about caring for the soul. If it is, then it seems to me we cheapen God's Word, simplifying it to nothing more than a good movie that moves us and excites us, requiring nothing of us. We are really missing the boat if we do not engage with the scriptures, including the ones that speak about the future. The scriptures, God's Word, call us to be disciplined.

Someone is reported to have asked a violinist in New York's Carnegie Hall how she became so skilled. She said that it was by "planned neglect." She planned to neglect everything that was not related to her goal.

Practicing spiritual disciplines is planned neglect that keeps us on track, no matter how hard things get, so that we reach our eternal goal with Christ.

What time is it? It is time to choose Jesus and not the deceivers of the world. There are and will continue to be false prophets out there in the world trying to sway us from the truths of God. They will try to manipulate us during times of personal vulnerability, pulling on our fragile emotions, to create doubts about the existence and sovereignty of God.

The deceivers will tell us when we are suffering that there cannot possibly be a God. If there was a God and he loved you, he would not allow you to suffer. False prophets influence our world with selfishness and with apathy for others. Their message to us is that we should look out for "number one." They say God wants us to be happy and to prosper, which indeed he does, but not at the expense of others. If we do not purposely choose to focus on and follow Jesus, we can fall victim to these lies that will in the end, separate us from our Eternal God.

It seems then, **if** we want to endure and persevere through the difficulties and suffering in our future, it does us no good to ask Jesus, "how long?" or "when will you come to end our suffering?" But, instead, we should ask ourselves what we are doing in the meantime. Clearly, there are those who understood this, otherwise the church would not exist today.

Turning the clock ahead from the day that Jesus spoke to those followers gathered at the Temple, we learn that the Temple, in fact, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., but neither Judaism nor Christianity were destroyed. That's because the Spirit of God transcends all buildings and structures. Both religions continued to grow and develop over the centuries, spreading all over the world, and welcoming people of all ethnicities and races. **This happened**

because the Temple became the people of God through which God did, and still does, his work in the building of his kingdom.

Debra Mumford, writer of commentary for this text on "Working Preacher" says, "People can take heart that though Christianity seems to be declining in some denominations, through the Spirit and power of God, it will continue to live and grow in new forms and new places. Our task is to ask for discernment about what God wants us to do and then follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit to get it done." (We might lack the self-confidence to do this.)

God doesn't need eloquence to reach people. He just needs a voice, your voice, with a living, vital connection to Him in prayer. Luci Swindoll, author, pastor and sister of Chuck Swindoll, wrote this telling illustration on the subject: "A friend of mine was caught in an elevator during a power failure. At first, there was momentary panic as all seven strangers talked at once. Then my friend remembered the tiny flashlight he had in his pocket. When he turned it on, the fear dissipated. During the 45 minutes they were stuck together, they told jokes, laughed, and even sang. [The Bible] says we are that flashlight. Just as the flashlight draws power from its batteries, we draw power from Jesus. As light, we dissipate fear, bring relief, and lift spirits. We don't even have to be big to be effective. We just have to be 'on.'"

Jesus tells us, it is not only time to be disciplined to strengthen our own spirits, but it is also time to spread the Good News and help to get the lost on-board with Jesus. He warns us that this is not going to come easily. People will reject what we share, and they may reject us, and this includes the possibility of even our friends and family rejecting us.

However, Jesus assures us in verses 17-19: "You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls." We know that many of those listening to Jesus that day, did indeed suffer and die for spreading the Gospel, but as the scripture says, they gained their souls, which are eternal, and the body isn't. Hallelujah! This is good news for us! Who of us does not want to have God on our side! Who of us does not want our souls to dwell in and with the goodness and love of God!

I wonder, who among us would not want those we love to know Jesus? Isn't it worth all of our efforts, even though it may be uncomfortable for us, to lead others to Jesus? As Christians, blessed by the love and mercy of God and freed from sin through the sacrifice of His only Son, we know that we cannot and we will not refuse the opportunity to spread the Good News through word and deed. Our faith simply will not allow it. It is time for all Christians to point the way to Jesus before it is too late.

Those who truly believe Jesus to be the Savior of the World are not troubled by questions involving the timing of God's plans for the future of His creation and Christ's return. **They know it as a fact that God wins in the end, and that's all they need to know.** For the faithful, the question is what will I do in the meantime? To whom or what will I be tied? Hopefully, Jesus. How will I make that happen? I encourage you to ask God and call upon the Holy Spirit, to help you to build upon the foundation of Jesus Christ to carry you through the future and into the promises of the good He has for you. And equally important is to be an open Temple where the Spirit of God flourishes and meets others through you.

What time is it? It is and always will be throughout all of eternity God's time. May that fact and that promise made to us by God, revealed to us through Jesus, give us all peace and endurance for the in the meantime. Amen.