

Luke 21:5-19

5When 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.” 7They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” 8And 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.” 10Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; 11there 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. 13This will give you an opportunity to testify. 14So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; 15for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. 16You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. 17You will be hated by all because of my name. 18But not a hair of your head will perish. 19By your endurance you will gain your souls.

SERMON

It's eerie watch older movies showing the New York City sky line in which the World Trade Centre's two towers still stand. Those first hearing and reading Luke's Gospel must have shared similar feelings. Between the time Jesus lived and the time Luke penned his Gospel, the Temple had been

destroyed. The temple the disciples admired had been recently refurbished by Herod the Great. This temple stood for more than 500 years—it had been re-dedicated nearly 200 before Jesus' time. We know that occasion of re-dedication today as Hanukkah. By Luke's time, the Temple lay in ruins as retaliation from Rome at the revolts Jewish people had directed against the empire.

How jarring it must be when things we are sure will last forever crumble into dust or are destroyed by greed and malice. At this minute, polar ice caps melt as the planet heats up. The Amazon rain forest would be levelled if some politicians have their way.

Life since 2020 has changed in ways large and small. Work has changed. School has changed. Church has changed.

Even our personal lives turn on a dime with a health crisis, a death in the family, or even in happy times when a baby is born or adopted, or a young adult marries or enters into a committed partnership. The old adage states that impermanence is the only thing that's permanent.

Recalling that moment with Jesus and his followers sitting in front of the Temple churns up questions for us personally and as a community of faith. I admire how some of the commentators from Working Preacher phrase and frame the questions and I'll borrow their language to lift them before us:

Where to we focus our attention? What do we see?

What do we say when we're confronted by impermanence?

What is our response to false prophets; who fix blame and job off easy answers?

Finally, to whom do we turn when things unravel?

We might quickly answer that we turn to Jesus in such times. Our response sparks more questions:

Whose version of Jesus do we have in mind?

What does Jesus see when looking at our world and our lives today?

How does our focus and vision vary from what Jesus sees?

What would life be like if we saw the world, life, and our neighbours as Jesus sees them?

Those shifts in perspective are what Jesus calls repentance—seeing in new ways and the ways of seeing shape our ways of being in the world.

The destruction of the Temple happened so long ago, we might not feel the loss— maybe we weren't even aware of such history. How amazing that the physical centre of faith, civic life, and community wellness was set to rubble and even when the people were scattered, Judaism and Christianity live on.

We might not live in Temple Glory, yet we go on too. Maybe we live as little beacons of hope in the world. Let me tell you about a family of beacons whose light shines. The Rev. Dr. Anna Madsen shares a story of devastation from her life. Her husband was killed in a car-pedestrian crash that left their toddler with traumatic brain injury and little Karl hovered tenuously between life and death for many months. Bill and Anna's daughter Elsa was still an infant.

Many months later, the family returned from Germany to the States for Bill's funeral. Anna recalls rushing to the seminary chapel, forgetting Bill's urn. Frantically, she dashes back to retrieve it. In this devastating moment and in the calamity, little Elsa, barely a toddler begins singing to her distraught mommy, "This Little Light of Mine".

Even with lingering pain and grief, Anna, Karl, and Elsa shine brightly as they manage day to day. Karl lives with Anna, her newlywed husband David he and instigates joy and mischief into their home and the Spent Dandelion Retreat Centre. Elsa is a fierce woman of deep compassion studying at university and she plans to let her light shine in public service. You might like to visit Anna's facebook page or website called OMG. Her witness through all she's experienced comes down to this; the last word indeed belongs to God.

As we are troubled by forces negating life, and we're dismayed by change, and feel powerless sometimes—maybe an act of faith would be to sing a little....*This Little Light of mine....*