

Title: Bad News First

Text: Luke 21:5-38

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I wonder what your favorite holiday is. Mine is Thanksgiving. I know, most people expect me to say Christmas or Easter. After all, I am a preacher. But my favorite holiday is Thanksgiving. Always has been.

Perhaps it's because Thanksgiving has somehow resisted being entirely consumed by the shopping malls and advertising campaigns. There's no Santa in a turkey suit. No Easter Bunny made of pumpkin pie. Just a table. Some food. Family, maybe. Friends, if you're lucky. And if we're fortunate, there is a little table space in our hearts to give thanks.

We do have plenty to be thankful for, don't we? There's food on most of our tables. Clothes in our closets. Roofs over our heads. Not everyone shares that, we know—some sleep outside, some go hungry, and some live paycheck to paycheck. However, as a nation, we could take care of everyone if we were truly serious and wanted to.

Still, I have to ask: *Do you feel thankful this November?* After a shooting in a Michigan Catholic Church that took the lives of children, do you feel thankful? With the economy shaken by tariffs, a government shutdown, and anger rising in our politics, do you feel thankful? When the shouting matches don't just happen on TV but at the dinner table, do you still feel thankful?

Because the world does feel tilted, every headline says so. Prices up. Trust down. People are tired, anxious, and struggling to sleep.

And that's just the national picture. Closer to home, here in Franklin, our community is experiencing rapid growth. Change everywhere. Even here at First Presbyterian, we're in a season of transition. We are between pastors. Between what was with Pastor Chris and what will be with your new pastor.

And so again, I ask—maybe a little quieter this time—do you feel thankful? In a church in transition? In a city that is changing faster than we can keep up? In a country exhausted by politics? Is Thanksgiving still possible?

Maybe it is. Perhaps it's not the sunshine kind. Not the "everything's fine" kind. Maybe it's the Thanksgiving that keeps standing when everything else starts shaking. The Thanksgiving that says, *"I will trust, even here."*

The disciples knew something about shaking ground. One day, they were standing in the Temple courts. The air was thick with the smell of incense and dust. Sunlight bounced off white marble and gold. The Temple gleamed like a jewel dropped out of heaven. The disciples were so excited to be there that they couldn't help themselves. "Look, Lord! Look at these stones! Look at this place!"

And Jesus looks, too. Then he says softly, *"You see all this? The days will come when not one stone will be left upon another."* And just like that, the air went still.

They must've looked at him, waiting for a grin, a wink, a "just kidding." But there wasn't one.

The startled and shaken disciples said, “*What do you mean, Jesus? You’re the Messiah! You came to save this place, not tear it down.*” If I’d been there, I might’ve muttered, “Thanks for nothing, Jesus.”

But he wasn’t finished. He told them worse was coming. Wars. Earthquakes. Famines. Betrayals. “*You will be handed over,*” he said, “*some of you put to death.*” No one could accuse Jesus of sugarcoating the gospel.

We prefer our bad news to be softened, don’t we? Maybe with a bit of humor. But Jesus doesn’t wrap it. He says it straight. The temple will fall. The world will shake. The faithful will suffer.

And then, he adds something strange. Something almost unreasonable. “*Make up your mind,*” he says, “*not to worry beforehand.*”

Make up your mind not to worry? Who talks like that? As if worry were a switch we could flip.

But maybe Jesus means something else. Perhaps he means: *Decide now what kind of person you’ll be when the shaking starts.* Because it always starts, doesn’t it? For a nation. For a family. For a single person. The stones we thought were permanent start to move.

The cancer diagnosis. The unexpected job loss. The child who won’t speak to you. The fire that consumes the home. The funeral of a sixteen-year-old driver. And Jesus says, “*Don’t worry beforehand. Trust that when the time comes, God will give you what you need.*” That’s not denial. That’s faith.

Now, it’s tempting to say, “Well, it’s easy for Jesus to talk. He’s Jesus.” But remember, he knew what was coming for him, too. He knew the same stones that would fall on Jerusalem would soon fall on him—a cross raised outside the city gate. His body is a broken mess that is buried in a borrowed tomb on a Friday. For the disciples, their past life was gone, and the future looked uncertain. And still he said, “*Do not be anxious.*”

Bishop Fulton Sheen once said, “*All worry is atheism.*” It sounds harsh. But he meant that worry is what happens when we live as if God isn’t real—when we act as if it’s all up to us. And Jesus knew that temptation—to trust what we can see: the buildings, the systems, the wealth, the reputation, and the routine. We think that if we can keep everything standing, we’ll be safe.

But maybe that’s why he said, “*As for what you see here...*” Because the kingdom of God isn’t built of marble and gold. It isn’t found in what glitters or lasts. The kingdom is built in hearts that trust when everything visible begins to crumble.

Before the kingdom can rise, the temple has to fall. Not just the one in Jerusalem, the ones in here. The temples that are built in our hearts. The temples of control. The temples of pride. The temples of comfort. Sometimes those have to come down before the Spirit can move in.

Do you recall what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well? He said, “*The time is coming when you will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth.*” And then he said, “*That time is now.*”

That’s what he’s saying at the temple, too. Don’t mistake what you can see for what’s eternal. When the stones fall—and they will—God is still God. Before the kingdom can rise, the temple has to fall. And when it does, something holy is set free.

You see, the peace Jesus offers isn't the kind that waits for everything to be okay. Jesus offers the kind that holds you when everything's not fine, and you know who holds you anyway.

So, as we head toward Thanksgiving, maybe the question isn't, "*What are you thankful for?*" Perhaps it's, "*Can you give thanks when there's nothing to be thankful for?*" When the diagnosis isn't good? When the job doesn't come back? When the table feels emptier than it did last year?

Maybe the deepest kind of gratitude is the kind that doesn't depend on how things are going. The kind that trusts God even when the blessings aren't obvious.

Paul said it like this: "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*"

"*With thanksgiving*," Paul says—even when there's nothing. Because when you give thanks for nothing, you're really giving thanks for the one thing that never fails. God's faithfulness lasts forever. The temple may fall. The world may shake. But the steadfast love of God remains.

So, on Thanksgiving, when you sit down at your table—whether it's full of people or you and a plate of leftovers. Maybe you'll whisper a different kind of prayer: "Not just thank you for what I have." (pause) "But thank you, Lord, even when I have nothing." (pause) "Thank you, even now." (pause)

And maybe—just maybe—that's when the peace that passes understanding will slip quietly into the room and take its seat at the table. No fanfare. No trumpet. Just peace — reaching for your hand, passing the bread.

Before the kingdom can rise, the temple has to fall. And after it falls, what remains is grace.

Be anxious in nothing. Be prayerful in everything. Be thankful in everything. And the peace of God—the real peace, not the world's imitation—will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.