

GLORY TO THE FATHER AND TO THE SON AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT,
AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, IS NOW AND WILL BE FOREVER.
AMEN.

When King David lamented over the death of King Saul, killed by his own hand, and Jonathon, beloved friend of David, killed by the Philistines,” David commanded this lament be taught to the people: King David cried, “Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon the high places! How are the mighty fallen!” How are the mighty fallen is a cry which resonates through world history. Mighty kings have fallen and mighty empires fade away. *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*—thus goes the glory of the world. How the mighty are fallen.

Some of you have visited Egypt. We have had the privilege of doing so, twice. It is an impressive place to see—the pyramids and sphinx, the Valley of the Kings and Queens, the temples of Thebes and Memphis, the River Nile winding through the desert. The English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley saw the great statues of Ramses II fallen near Luxor and wrote his poem, *Ozymandias*: “My name is Ozymandias, king of kings. Look on my works, ye might, and despair! Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away.” Human history is one long record of the rise and fall of nations, kingdoms, empires which one by one have fallen. Now we have not come together to talk about ancient kings and fallen empires. The great Harry Emerson Fosdick, pastor of New York’s Riverside Church, talked about powerful preaching as anything but dead history. He said, “No one comes to church to find out what happened to the Jebusites.” No, we do not gather to hear about ancient tribes and peoples—the Jebusites were the original rulers of Jerusalem and were themselves assimilated by King David when he made Jerusalem his capital. That was 3000 years ago. Nor have we gathered to dissect the last election in this country. We can let the pundits on television and in the newspapers and magazines continue to do so. Yet it is important to recognize what history teaches clearly—the things of God are eternal and human things merely temporal, temporary; even that which is of most value will not stand the test of time. In Jesus day, the great Temple of Solomon had been rebuilt and was finally completed by King Herod.

Eyewitness accounts describe its huge stones, golden pillars and dazzling beauty. It was likely the most beautiful building in the whole world at the time of Jesus, better than anything in the imperial capital of Rome itself. Some of the ashlar of Herod's Temple can still be seen in Jerusalem. They are immense blocks of cut stone—much finer than the later Arab and Crusader and Turkish stones built on top of them. The only remaining part of the Temple area is the Western Wall of the Temple Mount. Nothing remains of the Temple itself. Through the centuries Jews have gathered at the Wall to pray and lament the loss of their temple. It is the holiest shrine in Judaism this Western Wall, the Wailing Wall. Jesus had foretold its destruction in our Gospel passage for today which speaks of God's plans for the universe and each one of us. It seems that Jesus was leaving the Temple and one of his followers was overcome by awe of this great building. As he was coming out of the Temple, one of his disciples said to Jesus, "Look, teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Even today, Jerusalem is one of the seven wonders of the modern world but we can only imagine how it would be with a glorious Temple. For believers, the sight of the Temple would have been just breathtaking. And Jesus responds by saying simply that it would be torn down. Within forty years it was. Our text continues with the disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew sitting with Jesus on the Mount of Olives looking towards the Temple. The disciples asked Jesus privately about the end of the world. Jesus told them the signs that they would see—false prophets, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines. All these things would come but they should not be alarmed. Jesus never said when the end would come but reminded the disciples to be ready at all times. They should not be alarmed but ready. We should not be alarmed but ready. The fall of the Temple was a sign that the time of salvation was coming; the sorrows would be a sign of the birth pangs of God's coming kingdom. This world was passing away with great pain, but coming was God's realm of peace and justice and healing.

I was reading recently how differently the thought of the end times are viewed depending upon the social location of the viewer. Those who have suffered much in this life through poverty or disease, loneliness or loss, look forward with eager longing for the coming of God's kingdom. For people heavily burdened in this life, the words of Jesus are words of hope to lay aside their burdens and enter God's kingdom with joy. Those who have much hear the words of the end with

grief and a sense of loss. I remember a scene from the movie, *Planet of the Apes*. When Charlton Heston returned from space, he came back to a ruined city of New York. The Statue of Liberty was atilt but the twin towers of the World Trade Center were still standing. We are pained when we thing of the destruction of September 11th and all the grief and loss of that day. It is a reminder that someday America may join the Hittites and Amorites and Jebusites and our monuments fall like the statue of Ozymadias, king of kings.

But let us be encouraged. God is still in charge. Yes, there was great sadness when the Temple fell and among the Jewish people there still is. As Christians we are not promised that there will not be tribulation or distress in store for us, but there is hope in sorrow. We have been given a promise that will never fail. God has the whole world in His hands. History is really His Story, God's story. God's word will last even when everything else fails and God's promise of salvation in Jesus Christ is sure.

At the entrance to Luther Seminary in St. Paul is a replica of an old Viking cross. On it are the letters VDMA. They are Latin and a good contrast to the phrase, *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*—the glories of the world are fleeing, but God's Word endures forever. VDMA—*Verbum Dei Manet in AEternam*. The Word of God remains forever. God's Word will not fail, just as Jesus Christ promises to be with us event to the close of the age.

This morning we will sing one of my favorite hymns. Bishop Nikolai Grundtvig wrote the words over a hundred and fifty years ago. He talked about the rock of our faith: "Built on a rock the Church doth stand, Even when steeples are falling. Crumbled have spires in every land. Church bells still are chiming and calling...High in the heavens His Temples stand, all earth temples excelling."

Our Lord reminds us, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Nothing in this world will last, nothing. Our days, too, will fade into the annals of forgotten time, our monuments join those of the Egyptians; our churches the fallen stones of the Temple. What remains is God's Word and God's promise to us. We are not forgotten by God. We are precious in God's sight. When others forget us, when our gravestones are worn away, when we no

longer have family to bring a flower to put beside our monument, God will remember us. We are God's creation. We are redeemed by Christ. We are sustained by the Holy Spirit. When the kingdoms of this world have passed away, we will enjoy an eternal kingdom.

As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens... So we are always of good courage." *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*—how the mighty are fallen, the temples destroyed and we too will fade away. *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternam*—God's Word last forever. God's promise is sure. Jesus Christ has given us the victory. Be of good courage. Trust in the Lord. Amen.