

Luke 21: 5 - 19

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." 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.

“The Unshakable Foundation”

Luke 21:5-19

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La Habra UMC

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How often do we feel hopeful after checking the news?

Natural and human-made disasters, wars and violence, climate change and ecological crises, crime in the streets, shootings in schools and religious gatherings, injustice, political and corporate corruptions – the list is long and disheartening. It is hard to stay hopeful in such a world.

Today’s scripture said, this is nothing new.

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As Sharon read to us....

It seems Jesus was at the temple with his disciples, and they heard people admiring the temple and its beauty. Luke recorded....

When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God

Jesus, however, foretold its destruction:

the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down

His words remind us that even the most impressive works of human hands are temporary. Our security cannot rest in things that can crumble, but in the eternal promises of God.

Then the disciples asked him,

“Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?”

I guess it is human nature to desire to know when, especially it is about the end of the world ... Is it because we want be prepared?

(As we get older, we more or less think about the end of our life –

My mother always cleaned and organized her closet before a long travel, like coming to the US. She said, “If I die while I was gone, I don’t want others to see the messiness...)

By pronouncing the destruction of the Temple itself, he was in fact telling the disciples, the end of the old world to which the Temple is related.

Then, Jesus described tumultuous events—wars, earthquakes, famines, plagues, and fearful sights. Jesus warned his disciples that such reports and realities were natural, all signs of a broken world and a broken relationship with God

The end would be unexpected – it could come at any moment – but it is not necessarily near.

Symbolically, the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world itself... was foretelling his own death and what the disciples would go through afterward....

They would be persecuted and they would be given opportunity to witness.

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.

And there was a promise: that they would not be alone. Even after Jesus died, he would be with them. He would give them words to speak and courage to stand up...

Beautifully adorned buildings would collapse, but as long as I am your foundation, you will be safe with me:

¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your souls.

As long as you are with me, you are standing on unshakable foundation!

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I have a personal story to share at this point:

This was a spiritual experience I had when I was in my early twenties. As some of you already know, I was raised in a Buddhist home and went to high school founded by Methodist missionaries. So Bible class, weekly chapels and homeroom class meditations were mandatory. I barely made through these requirements to graduate but declared I was an atheist and warned people not to push religion on me.

After high school, I came to the United States to join my father who was stationed at LAX as the general manager of Korean Air Lines. Nine months after I arrived with my mother and three younger siblings in LA, just when I was ready to take some courses at a community college, my father received a new assignment to manage the branch office in Paris and to prepare for the opening of the Frankfurt office. I decided to stay in LA to pursue my education, and my three siblings also said they would stay in LA. So, my parents moved to Paris, and I became a head of a household at the age of 19, with three teenagers, a brother and two sisters, under my supervision, with no driver's license, and barely speaking English.

I worked hard, keeping up with a part-time job as a switchboard operator at KAL, full-time loads at the college, taking buses but saving money for driving lessons, and managing the three teenagers. During this time, I met a friend, whose name was Nelly, and she and her parents were "Christians." They sang in three different choirs and went to church, not only on Sundays, but several times even during the week. When I visited them, Nelly's mother often told me I should go to church with Nelly. I smiled and did not say anything, but I thought to myself, "I worked hard, I was responsible, and I had a good sense of morality. I did not need God to help me out in life. Religion is for cowards and lazy people!"

It was during the History of American Ideology at the college; I began to wonder about this God whom the pilgrims believed. And why did this big country put in their dollar bills, "In God We Trust." Who is this God? I wanted to know. One day, I woke up from a nightmare in the middle of the night. I was so scared and shaking... then, noticed there was a "presence." This presence told me I was OK. When I asked, "Are you sure?" I was affirmed, and it took some time, but I was

able to relax. As I relaxed, I was able to recognize the Presence. I said, “I know who you are. You are Jesus! And I learned that Jesus loved people.” There was affirmation. There were no sounds, but I was clearly communicating with this Presence. I asked, “Do you love me, too?” And there was another affirmation. At this time, I burst out giggling, and I could hear myself giggling and felt so happy. This presence, then, told me to pray, and I said I did not know how to pray but I could learn. The instruction came as to repeat, “Jesus loves me!” and I repeated that hundreds of times. Then, the next sentence was “Love everybody!” So I repeated, “Jesus loves me, love everybody.” Again, I repeated

The next sentence that came to me was, “Be persecuted for my sake.” And I communicated, “No, I don’t have to be persecuted for your sake. I learned about people being persecuted when you were alive and after you died. But this is a different time. We are in the United States, there is freedom of religion. I don’t have to be persecuted.” And the prayer lesson sort of stopped at that point.

The next morning, I called my friend Nelly to visit me at my home. Then, I told her what happened. After listening, she told me, “It’s time for you to go to church!” I agreed with her. She told me she would pick me up that evening, and I should be wearing black. I asked her why we go to church on Friday night. She said, they went to church on a Friday once a year, and it happened to be that evening. I don’t remember much about the worship service, but I remember the last hymn was “The Old Rugged Cross.” I was familiar with that hymn because we sang it several times during our chapel in high school. But that night, as I sang, I had tears rolling down. I was not sad, and I did not know exactly how, but I somehow felt the old rugged cross had something to do with me. That was Good Friday in 1978.

And about 10 years later, one morning I heard a voice saying, “go to seminary.” It seemed the whole world was against me. Then, as I was praying in my frustrated state why I had to go to seminary, a small voice came to me, “Be persecuted for my sake.” I remembered and finally accepted that prayer which I had rejected when it came to me for the first time. Some would say that a Calling. I realized I had a lot to learn, and it takes time to mature and grow in faith.

I wish I could say that was the end of the lesson. I wish I could say, as long as I accepted the call to become a pastor, as long as I serve this pretty awesome denomination called, United Methodist Church, I am safe and sound.

Well... I tell you something...

The lesson gets more subtle as we get more mature in our faith.

You noticed in the beginning of today's text, they were speaking about the temple?

When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God

I wish they were in a different building. Jesus was talking about the temple itself crumbling down, not a government building, not the Wall Street.... But the temple... and in our text, the church itself. And they were the gifts dedicated to God...

So, where is the good news?

How do we know we are standing on the unshakable foundation?

Living a faithful life is not for sissies.

Discipleship is hard work. And Jesus promised to be with us.

Faithfulness is not about picking and choosing.

It is a full-time job. And God promised to be with us now and forever.

I know the unshakable foundation is God's love and grace, but I could not say, we always stand on this unshakable foundation... because we have limited understanding.

So instead of saying, you are ok... I want to close this sermon with a prayer:

Unshakable God,

Give us strength, power, and conviction to stand firm in our faith and always be in intimate communion with you that our life be steadfast witnesses to your love and grace.

Amen.

Final Hymn:

1. My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain:

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand:
all other ground is sinking sand;
all other ground is sinking sand.*

2. When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
in every high and stormy gale,
my anchor holds within the veil.

3. His oath, his covenant, his blood,
support me in the whelming flood;
when all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay.