

Pentecost 23C: November 17, 2019 → This was delivered on 11/17/19

Rev. Ken Wratten at St Stephen's San Jose

Malachi 4:1-2a

See, the day is coming - All the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Do not be weary in doing what is right

Luke 21:5-19

By your endurance you will gain your soul

The reading from Luke's Gospel today can be divided into three parts: Jesus' prediction that the Jerusalem Temple would be destroyed; giving some signs to tell when the time is coming for the full arrival of God's Kingdom on the earth; and warning that there would be a time when his followers would be persecuted.

First, the Temple: After the return of the people from exile in Babylon, the second temple was completed around 515 B. C. to replace Solomon's temple that had been destroyed in 586 B. C. In Jesus' time, Herod the Great was enlarging and renovating the second temple. This was not simply a building, or even a church. It was an institution. It represented the heart of Jewish religious identity and national identity. It would be unthinkable that this magnificent monument to Yahweh, the place on our planet where heaven and earth met, could someday not exist. But in fact the Romans burned and destroyed the temple in 70 AD, and it has never been rebuilt. It became necessary for there to be a new kind of temple.

Secondly, signs of the approach of God's Kingdom. Jesus warned that there is a difference between what we call chronos time and kairos time. 'Chronos' time is the time we keep with our watch. It moves steadily and dependably forward. Jesus said this is NOT how God operates. Kairos time is based on things happening when the time is right. Kairos time is like the time being right for a child to leave the parent's home: for some that is at graduation from high school. For some, the right time is when they get married; for some it could be a long, long time. The full arrival of God's Kingdom will be when God sees that the time is right. Don't try to guess...

For the third piece of Jesus' predictions, he warned that followers of his teaching would be persecuted. The Book of Acts records that these persecutions were already happening when Acts was written, around 80 AD. Jesus was explaining that this is all part of God's plan. History is not standing still; history is not traveling in a big circle. It is moving toward God's purpose, and it is moving in God's time. Jesus said that God will reward our endurance through any hardships we face because of our faith.

Another insight about this grand flow of history is given by Paul. People in Thessalonica were so caught up in the majesty of God's plan; and in Jesus' return to set everything right, that they decided they could just wait around for it to happen. They could sit back, forgetting about the responsibilities that Jesus taught about loving our neighbor, and being servant leaders, and demonstrating radical forgiveness and generosity.

Paul's point is that WE are part of the transformation that is God's plan. It is our job to help build the new Jerusalem. And that building project starts inside us. It does not start by our changing the whole world, which is a pretty daunting task, but by changing ourselves.

THAT is why we go to Chamberlains Children's Home to spend time with the kids; we help the Food Bank to provide bags of health snacks for school kids; we honor our First Responders; we provide a safe and fun learning center for Hollister preschool aged kids; and help hurricane victims in the Virgin Islands; and on-and-on.

THAT is why we meet together to pray for each other, and praise God out loud, and get ourselves re-charged on Sundays - to take God back with us into the world and to the places where we work.

So let me wrap up what I get from today's Scripture lessons this way:

The building of God's Kingdom, and the arrival of God's right time, depend at least in part, on our own work to build that Kingdom inside us; and to carry that Kingdom with us throughout our day. The temple of God is not in Israel anymore. The temple of God is right here; but we need to make the space for God to be here. As a faith community, do our ministry and mission and fellowship move God's kairos time forward? For each of us, does our spiritual life move God's kairos time forward?

Celebrate being God's new Temple. Amen.