

“Undoing Bad Theology”
23rd Sunday after Pentecost – November 13, 2022 – Luke 21:5-19/C

At our most recent clergy text study, one of my colleagues was wearing a teeshirt -Martin Luther on the front, hammer in hand, as he prepared to nail the 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The caption was, “The door is fine, I’m just fixing your theology!” While this is NOT a Reformation sermon – we’re a few weeks past that Lutheran festival – it is a comment on what we all have been doing as we try to be faithful to the Gospel that Jesus revealed, while at the same time trying not to get distracted by what the religious, political and national culture is speaking to us day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. It seems to be a constant struggle to keep ourselves rooted in the simple truths that God has shared with us since the beginning - that Jesus embodied during his time among us in the flesh – and that the Spirit continues to whisper to us through prayer, our encounters through the Bible, and as we live our lives in service to and for each other.

We are all – as faithful Christians - trying to “undo bad theology.” Not just for those who will believe anything that seems easy and that appeals to them, but for ourselves as well.

Because it seems so very easy – when winds of misfortune or change blow all around us – for us to forget our purpose as lovers of our Creator, and followers of his beloved Son, Jesus. So very easy to not spend enough time with God (however you choose to do that.) So very easy to choose power over rather than forgiveness. So very easy to let pride be our motivator, (as we keep looking for where we fit on the good/better/best scale,) instead of simply being grateful for what we have, for what we know in our heads and what we feel in our hearts.

As I pondered the timing for my retirement, I knew that I wanted it to sync with the ending of the Church Year. Because each time we finish up the long, green season of Pentecost, it is hard not to hark back to Spring - the Day of Pentecost, the 50th day of Easter – with its flashy red celebration that talked about power, and Spirit-gifts and the incredible growth of the fledgling church in all its newness and possibility. We love the glory, the joy, the flames and the celebrating! But as the season goes on through the summer months, and life changes right in front of us, we sometimes forget to share ourselves, our time, and our possessions with someone else. Especially when the call of re-creating ourselves takes up so much of that long green season! So, today is a time for thoughts about the end of our Church Year, about your New Year’s resolutions - liturgically speaking - and for hearing the last bits of Luke, as we anticipate the new year and a new story-teller, Matthew.

Today’s passage is part of what is known as “the little apocalypse” – a few stories Jesus told about how the times would be changing, during one of *his* “last lectures” (fitting, eh?) It probably felt pretty normal that he and his disciples were again in the temple – where he was teaching, and praying and preparing his flock to make the change from *following* to *leading*. But those around him tried to avoid what they knew was coming by changing the subject and focusing on how amazing was the temple they had all known since their childhood. And then came the truth of the matter: nothing lasts forever in this world - not the grandness of the Temple in Jerusalem (the center of religious life and worship) – not the ministries for which they were preparing – nor even the relationships with family and friends. This was a new beginning for which they weren’t totally prepared.

And yet, the message of hope behind their fears was so clear – in every page and in every story with Jesus at the center: even when every system, every building, every comfort zone they might be enjoying was going away – Jesus told them they were going to be okay. And YOU will also

survive and thrive. For you belong to God, and there is nothing you can do about it! You're caught. (But you're also prepared.) You're trained. And God's got you. So, don't be afraid. It's your turn in the game; your chance on the court; your call to be God's people both here and in whatever worlds you occupy day by day.

I can just imagine what is going through your minds right now..."What?! Just as we are so close to a whole new Church Year – with ministries that were lying fallow during the pandemic starting up again, with new opportunities for ministry and new ways to do them being created – we were just getting used to the idea of you retiring and NOW you tell us WE have to witness to the Gospel?! (Just when you thought you had the game figured out, you find out what's expected of you!) I remember the feelings you might be feeling right now as Pastor Roger and I were poised to leave the seminary in Berkeley, California, and MOVE TO KANSAS! I was scared. I was afraid because – I didn't know how to share my faith. I was afraid that my life could *not be* above reproach. I was afraid that who I was (what I am) would just not be good enough.

Then I wondered if Jesus ever felt that way as well? A real, live flesh-and-blood human man could very possibly have experienced just the briefest flash of unsettling doubt – that what he had built with these followers might not last. And then I remembered the Garden of Gethsemane, where he might have shared with the Father his human fear that what he was investing in human history might not be enough.

But immediately following the fear, comes the grace. Jesus himself, soothing the fears of his disciples, telling them not to listen to the siren song of false prophets of the moment, or what words they would use to tell their stories of him and the work they had been doing together. All they needed to do (he assured them) was endure – to remain faithful – and through no merit of their own, God's love for them would prevail. Isn't that just like the Jesus we all love? Jesus, giving a pep talk to his friends – reminding them to place their burdens on him and asking for them to give their best – all they've got, no matter how small.

Just like that widow dropping her two mites in the offering, you might think that what you don't have just might keep you from getting involved at Advent. But trust me - God will provide in the areas you think you are lacking. Even now, there are new folks and visitors sitting in the pews, thinking about how God might use them. Even now, there are plans for new outreach and new opportunities to share from what you have and what you are. Even now, the time is at hand when we will all wait through our fears, as we prepare to bring our gifts to the Christ child.

And thus we transition out of the Pentecost season (the time of the church) and we are poised to enter again the beautiful blue season of Advent – the Season of Hope. Once there, any fears you carry with you from listening to the world, will begin to be transformed. So listen to what the angels always say, "Do not be afraid!" You are ready. You know what needs to be done. And God's got you. You will be the answer to the "bad theology" that is all around us. You will be the non-anxious presence in an anxiety driven culture. You will be disciples, as the gift of following Jesus becomes the gift of leading the world - the light that shines in the darkness.

So **be** at peace. And **serve** the Lord. Thanks be to God! Amen.

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