

YOUR REDEMPTION DRAWS NIGH!
Second Last Sunday of the Church Year
Rev. Steven D. Spencer – Pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church

Luke 21:5–36

And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives. "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!

Our text takes place when Jerusalem was packed with pilgrims. People from all over came to celebrate the Passover. The city's normal population of about 100,000 would increase to a million people or more. So many people filled the city that most the pilgrims would spend their nights camped outside the city on the hills in the countryside.

There was also the construction on the Temple. Herod's family project to remodel the Temple was already in its fiftieth year. That would continue for yet another thirty years. No doubt, many of the Passover pilgrims were curious to see the progress of the renovation of the Temple. No doubt many conversations centered on what had changed since the last visit.

This year to top it all off, there was talk of a rabbi that taught with great authority, did miracles and even raised the dead. Of course His name was Jesus. His entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of this Holy Week had set off a magnanimous display that nearly ended in a riot. He then spent His days preaching in the Temple and many people even followed Him back to His campsite on the Mount of Olives that night.

By the way, this is the historical setting for today's Gospel. From the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark we are able to determine that the events of Today's Gospel occur late on Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus had just finished a day of teaching and He and His disciples were heading for their campsite on the Mount of Olives.

As they leave the Temple someone remarks at the beauty of the stones and the decorations. They had probably been looking at the renovations of the temple and imaged the glory of the temple in its former years. Of course the beauty of the Temple was about much more than its physical appearance. It was the center of Jewish faith and culture. The Temple was the place where God dwelt, where He communicated with His people. There He revealed Himself to them - there He received their sacrifices for their sins. The Passover Pilgrims saw the Temple as God's revelation of Himself on earth. The Temple was where God was present.

God had a long history of dwelling with His people. ***“Enoch walked with God” [Genesis 5:22]. “Noah walked with God” [Genesis 6:9].*** Over thirteen chapters of Genesis tell about God's influence on the life of Abraham. The entire content of 4 of 5 books of the Torah tells how God brought forth a nation of people from Egypt and dwelt with them in fire and cloud, and in ark, altar, and tabernacle. God said in Exodus 29:45-46 ***“I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.”*** God was with His people and blessed them and they became a great nation. Eventually God's people built a temple. When Solomon dedicated the Temple, it was very obvious that God dwelt with His people. 2 Chronicles 7:1-2 says: ***“As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house”.*** All of this history of God dwelling with His people and more was centered in the Temple in Jerusalem.

So imagine the shock and distress the people felt when they heard Jesus talk about the Temple and say: ***“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”*** Jesus was telling them that the center and foundation of their culture and their faith would be destroyed. None of the Gospels tell us what the disciples talked about during the rest of the trip to their campsite. Maybe they just walked stunned silence, but as soon as they arrived the disciples asked Jesus for more information. So as they sat down on the Mount of Olives and looked across the Kid Ron valley at Jerusalem, imagine the gleaming light of a setting a sun, the Temple in the background glowing in its restored splendor, it's then that Jesus warns them that it would be utterly destroyed.

What those disciples and many other people forgot was that the Temple, the sacrifices, the festivals, and all the other requirements of the ceremonial law were only preparation for the day when God would dwell among His people as one of them. The altar, the Temple, the incense, the Sabbath, and all the other requirements of the ceremonial law were only a foreshadow pointing to a future reality. The continuous blood and smoke that came from the sacrifices of sheep, goats, cattle, and birds at the altar in Jerusalem was only a reminder that one day Immanuel, God with us, would come and God would dwell with His people.

Yes, these sacrifices were offered for the forgiveness of sins, but the fact that they needed to be done daily showed that sin was ever present and that these sacrifices were never enough. As the writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 10:11: ***“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.”*** All these requirements of the ceremonial law were only shadows of the good, the reality yet to come.

The danger for the people in first century Israel is that many thought the shadows were the reality. Many placed their trust on the ceremonial laws of the Temple. They thought they would earn their way into God's heart by keeping the ceremonial law perfectly. So they went through the motions and tried to keep the law perfectly in the hope that God would show them favor. They trusted the shadows instead of the reality.

Then the reality came, God in the flesh, the perfect unity of God and man in one person, Jesus Christ. God came to dwell with man as man. The people tried to keep the law, but they never could. The reality of God in Jesus Christ kept the law in all perfection. The people living in the world, in the shadows, offered sacrifices from their flocks and herds. But the reality offered Himself. The people living in the shadows offered sacrifices day after day, but it was never enough. The reality offered Himself once and for all, and it was enough for all people in all places and all times. Hebrews 10:12-14 says: ***“But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified”.***

History tells us that Herod the Great began his Temple remodeling project in 20 B.C. and that the work was finished sometime during 64 A.D. That is 84 years from start to finish. Yet, only six years later, in 70 A.D. the Roman army laid siege to Jerusalem and utterly destroyed it. Today, there is a Moslem shrine where the Temple once stood. The only trace of the Temple is the scattering of stones around the Temple mound.

What shadows take the place of the reality of God in your live? As Dr. Luther says in The Large Catechism, *“That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, is really your God”* (Explanation of the 1st Commandment). Do you depend on our own hard work and income as your reality? Is the accumulation of material things your reality? Do you depend on your reputation, your popularity, your standing in the community for your reality? Is pleasure your reality? Or have you made certain self appointed spiritual acts and duties your reality? Upon what does your heart rely and depend? Every one of us forgets that the things of this world are only shadows of the things to come. Every one of us fears, loves, and trusts the created things of this world instead of the God who created them. Yet, in the end, the things of this world, those things which seem so solid and so real, will pass away just like that Temple in Jerusalem.

Fortunately Jesus Christ still lives. He who sacrificed Himself on the cross for your sins now lives in those whom He saves. Since the temple is the place where God glory dwells that means that every person He has saved is His temple. How do we know that we are God’s temples? The Holy Spirit works through the reality of the Word and works faith in the heart. Through baptism the reality of the Word is combined with water and the Word and the Holy Spirit comes to live in and abide in you. The person whose trust is in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, that no longer trusts in the shadows of this world for salvation are the temple of God. Not by our work but by His (†) work!

Isn’t it appropriate that, as we near the end of the church year, we think about the end of our own time on this earth? Will your end come on the Last Day? All the signs Jesus mentions in today’s gospel have already happened. We continually read about nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. We’ve had great earthquakes, famines and pestilences. The terrors and great signs from heaven have already happened. Every time you check the news and hear or read about another disaster or war. This reminds us that this world is a shadow and that, one day, the reality of Jesus will come. On the other hand, your end may come in your own death. Either way when that end comes, those who trust in the shadows of this world will shriek in terror as the mouth of hell opens to swallow them forever into an eternity of pain and anguish. But on the other hand, those who trust in the reality of Jesus Christ will shout for joy as they enter into the blessed bliss of the eternal reality of heaven.

There we shall dwell forever with God and He will dwell with us as John writes in Revelation 21: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” ... And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

Your redemption has drawn nigh and His name is Jesus. And He has forgiven all your sins, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, and by Jesus blood, Amen and Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN!

