First United Presbyterian Church of Malad

November 13, 2022

Who Can Be Against Us?

Luke 21:5-19

**5**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.”

**7**They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” **8**And 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.” **10**Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; **11**there 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. **13**This will give you an opportunity to testify. **14**So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, **15**for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. **16**You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. **17**You will be hated by all because of my name. **18**But not a hair of your head will perish. **19**By your endurance you will gain your souls.

Honestly, there’s quite a bit going on in today’s gospel reading, and I found it somewhat difficult to know where to focus. One of the challenges I have, as a preacher, is to parse passages, like this one, in order to find that one theme; that one idea, within a particular reading, which resonates with me and gives me something to hang a meaningful message on. Sometimes it’s easy and sometimes, like this week, it’s much easier said than done. So we’ll see where everything lands this morning.

Last week’s Gospel reading had Jesus at the Temple where the Sadducees tried to trip Jesus up about resurrection. Today’s reading has Jesus still at the Temple, preaching and teaching. His disciples are with him and probably a bit bored, as they’ve heard this message many, many times before. So, they’re a bit distracted and start commenting on the physical beauty of the Temple. If you’ve ever seen drawings of the Second Temple, you’d have to agree with the disciples, that it was indeed a very beautiful building. Jesus, instead of simply agreeing with the disciples admiration of a beautiful building, prophesies about the destruction of this amazing place in verse 6, where he tells his disciples that, *“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.”* I imagine the disciples were shocked by this prophesy, and they want to know when this is going to happen.

Jesus’ response to the disciples nature curiosity, is positively Old Testament/Angry God, in its scope, as he describes a whole host of terrible things that will happen, leading up to the final destruction of the beloved Temple. False prophets will appear, nations will rise up against nations, and kingdoms will rise up against kingdoms, there will be famines, plagues and earthquakes and all sorts of other disasters.

Jesus goes on to tell his listeners that before any of this would happen, that they would be hated, persecuted, arrested and that some of them would even be put to death for their beliefs. I imagine that there may have been some of the disciples who regretted asking the question. In the end, though, Jesus offers some hope when, in verses 18 and 19, he tells his followers that *…. “Not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.”*

Now, as you may know, the author of Luke wrote these words about 80 years, or so, after Jesus’ cruxifixction and resurrection. Luke had the gift of 20/20 hindsight, as our Lord’s prophecy was fulfilled with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, when the Romans, putting down a rebellion by the Zelots, burned Jerusalem and the Temple, to the ground.

Fast forward 2,000 years, and we see many of the same signs Jesus prophesied about, coming around again. We live in an age where the world seems to be perpetually at war, where natural disasters are more and more deadly than every before, and we live in a time where false prophets pop up like dandelions after a spring rain. We read about fellow believers who are hated, persecuted, arrested and even put to death for their beliefs. And it seems that the entire world is spinning out of control.

It’s enough to make one’s hair stand on end, frankly, and I simply don’t remember a time, in my lifetime, where things were more screwed up than they are right now. It is certainly very easy to draw parallels between the Gospel reading and what’s going on in our world today, and it would also be very easy to be overwhelmed with fear and anxiety, given where we are today, as a nation. It’s can be easy to see the events occurring today, as signs of the end time signs and maybe they are. But let me remind you that no one, not even Jesus Christ himself, knows when the end, or the second coming will occur. Only God knows the day and the hour when that will happen.

Jesus, in giving the disciples the hope we see in verse 18 and 19, is telling us to endure, and that if we endure, not a single hair on our heads will be lost. And through our endurance, against all odds, against all persecution, through *that* endurance, we will gain our souls.

OK, so y’all might be thinking that’s easier said than done; how do we endure in the face of hardship? It’s a valid question and I’ll do my best to answer it.

In World War II, during the London Blitz, the British came up with a saying that I think answers the question of how we endure in the face of difficult times. That phrase, which you probably have heard, was “Keep Calm, and Carry On.”

Now, this phrase speaks to the relatively unflappable nature of the British people, unless football is involved, and I think that it applies, as well, to how we answer the question of endurance.

For the Brits, this phrase was a reminder that in spite of the unprecedented attack on their country; in spite of the horrors that the Germans were literally raining down on them, the only real course of action was to keep the faith and carry on.

For us, as followers of the risen Christ, I believe the same thing applies. When we are faced with a world that seems to have gone mad, we are also called to keep the faith and carry on.

Let me add here that, in my humble opinion, keeping the faith doesn’t mean we just sit around waiting for things to get better. I believe our faith compels us to act. If we see the world falling apart, don’t we have an obligation to go out and do whatever we can to correct the situation? I think we do, because I believe that faith without works is dead.

Here’s the thing; the ultimate message of the Gospel is one of hope. If we endure through all of the trials and tribulations that are thrown to us; if we endure, even when it seems all is lost, if we take action, as a result of our faith, then we gain our souls and not a hair on our heads will be lost.

Folks, your job is this: embrace the hope of the Gospel, keep calm, in the face of overwhelming odds, put feet, put action, to your faith and simply carry on. Because if God himself is for us, who can possibly be against us? AMEN