

November 13th, 2016

26th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

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St. Dunstan's, Carmel Valley

**Texts: Isaiah 65-17-25; Canticle 9; Luke 21:5-19**

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

Well, it's been a week, hasn't it? I have actually written out my sermon today. It's been over a year since I switched to preaching without notes or at most an outline, but I wanted to be precise in what I say today and not surprise myself by going off script. I'm just really sorry that Rodger wasn't able to set up a teleprompter I had hoped for! We'll see if I can still preach from the page or not.

The scene of today's Gospel is Jesus and his disciples walking in Jerusalem and seeing the Temple. What they are looking at is the famous "Second Temple" that Herod built, replacing the original one that was destroyed by the Babylonians. This Temple was one of the wonders of the world, and it took decades to build. Herod started it 19 years before Jesus was born, and during Jesus' adulthood it was brand new and shiny.

The disciples say, "Look at those stones!" Now, you have to imagine what they are seeing, stones that have been quarried that are as large as 100 tons a piece. Giant stones! How could they, with their technology back then, lift them up and fit them on the Temple Mount? And the Temple up above was built of beautiful carved marble, and the face of it being gold that reflected the sun so brightly it was blinding!

Inside the Temple was thought to be the dwelling of God, in the most inner sanctum called the "holy of holies." There was a great curtain that came down, behind which was God's presence. I have read that very few priests got the privilege of going into that area, just a few a year, and when they did, because it was so dangerous to be so near to God, they would tie a rope around that person's waste. If he were to collapse for any reason, they could pull him out without having to risk going in.

And in front of the Temple was an altar, which was a big part of Jewish religion at the time. You would make a great trip to visit the Temple, and then exchange your money for temple money. Then you'd use your Temple money to buy an animal to sacrifice, which the priest would sacrifice on the altar for you. This was thought to please God, and you can read all about sacrificial practices in the Old Testament, which are described in great detail.

We retain some of the same ancient patterns of the Jewish Temple even here in *this* room. The altar that we use is not for offering animal sacrifices, but what we offer is a “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.” You may have heard those words in the prayer we pray at the altar.

The altar, for us, is both a place of offering, and it serves the double purpose of also being a table for a meal—which is the sacrifice of Jesus, the lamb of God, who offers his body and blood as holy food and drink, a sacrifice to end all sacrifices!

And Paul points out that our bodies are a temple—actually, you could say our bodies are *the* Temple, the place where God dwells. No longer is God behind a curtain, hidden in a room in a building. God is in the center of our being, each one of us.

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Now, back to the Temple in Jerusalem, can you imagine what the disciples felt when they heard Jesus say that those stones would all come down? He says, “not one stone will be left upon another.

Jesus is being very provocative. He's pointing to one of the most solid, stable, institutional things in existence and saying it's going to go away.

Jesus says, over and over in all sorts of ways:

*Things have to die to for new things to be born.*

Naturally, the disciples ask, “When will this happen, Jesus?”

He doesn't really answer them, but tells them it's not going to be pretty. What he says next is conflicting, actually, in that there will be persecution and some will be killed, but that they will endure, nonetheless—that not one hair of their heads will be harmed!

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A friend of mine aptly quoted the Gospel of Matthew in a post she wrote on Wednesday, saying, “Do not fear what destroys the body, but what destroys the soul.”

This is something Jesus said to remind us what is real, and lasting, and what matters most. Do not be afraid of that which destroys only the body, which will go away some day no matter what, like the Temple did. The thing to care about is our souls.

And what destroys the soul? Hate does.

Whether we find ourselves on the winning side of this election, or the losing side, we all have to be concerned about each other. We all have to avoid the temptation to hate!

The election will not destroy us, but the hate that may or may not be unleashed in our own hearts, if we let it, will. As Martin Luther King once said:

“Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that!”

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Looking back to the image of the Temple, remember when Jesus said that he would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days? The people hearing this were shocked—How can this man say he'd destroy Herod's gigantic and beautiful temple and rebuild the whole thing in just three days?

He was not speaking literally, because the Temple he was talking about was his own body.

Remember how in that moment on the cross when Jesus died, the curtain in the Temple was torn in two!

The Temple of his body was destroyed and rebuilt, and the good news is that we do not need to put our faith in stone, or in institutions whether they be those of religion or government, or even in our own flesh. We put our faith in the love of God, which in the end will be victorious.

I wrote this in my message to you all on Wednesday, that I think every one of my sermons basically points to this truth, which is a theological statement and not a mere political line, and that is: *love wins*. I think that is the Christian story in two words!

I love the way Paul speaks of it in Romans, when he says:

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*

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I will repeat what I said earlier this week, that if you are happy this day, please do not neglect to be kind to those who are grieving and hurt. If you are hurting this day, remember that God's love is real and is bigger than anything we see in the ups and downs of public life. Do not lose hope.

The world may feel like it's coming apart in ways, but we have something better, which is a love that unites us and drives us to do good.

This week we continued on at St. Dunstan's doing all the usual ministry that keeps this place very active, touching lives, bringing healing and help to the poor, and definitely to one another.

A die-hard Democratic parishioner told me of the call she got from a beloved Republican parishioner asking how she was doing, and if she was OK. There have been many moments like that, where love is what defines us as followers of Christ. The world can learn from this sort of witness.

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And finally, I will share a reflection from a friend who recently wrote about doing some lobbying in congress several years ago. She was there with a leader who happens to be an evangelical Christian liberal by the name of Jim Wallis. (Yes, by the way, there *are* such things as “evangelical Christian liberals”) Here is a paraphrase of what he told them all:

These political officials think that *they* are the center of power, but they were deluded to think that.

They are not the center of power. No matter what, there is always the power of goodness, of commitment, of perseverance, of love.

More so, there is the power of forgiveness and reconciliation. Anyone who acts out of these things is incredibly powerful—not prisoners of fear, but servants of hope.

And that is what we are called to be.

—*Amen.*