

25 Pentecost
November 14, 2021

Sermon by The Rev. Mal Jopling

Then Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”” The temple in Jerusalem of which Jesus is referring was one of the most impressive sights in the ancient world. It was a massive and magnificent building. Its marble walls stood 150 feet high. The exterior of the building was decorated with 40-foot-high columns of white marble. There were ten gates by which to enter the temple’s outer courts, each one covered with silver and gold plate. It was both the spiritual and the architectural center of the city.

But Jesus knew that it would not last. In fact, only a few years after Jesus spoke the Romans destroyed the magnificent structure. Jesus goes on to say there will be wars and rumors of war, earthquakes, and famines. In the verses following today’s reading, Jesus speaks of brothers betraying brothers and fathers betraying their children and children rising up against their parents. Sound familiar? Jesus could well be speaking those same words about today’s troubled world as he was two thousand years ago. Each generation faces its own perilous and dangerous challenges. No one makes it through life without experiencing some dark and frightening times.

I would like to share with you this morning a story about another beautiful temple—the Cathedral in Coventry, England. It, like the temple in Jerusalem was a beautiful building built on a site where Christians have worshipped since the seventh century. But eighty-one years ago today, November 14, 1940, German bombers attacked the city of Coventry at the outset of World War II. The planes dropped 500 tons of high explosives and more than 40,000 firebombs on the city. The devastation was massive and horrendous. Thousands lost their homes and over 500 lost their lives. One casualty of that November night was Coventry Cathedral. Amid the rubble, all that remained was the south porch and tower, and the spire of the once beautiful Gothic Cathedral.

Those who listened to Jesus’ words could not have imagined that their beautiful temple would ever be destroyed. For those who experienced the horror of that November night in Coventry, it surely must have seemed as if this was the end of everything for them. All was lost. All hope was gone. The signs that Jesus points to transcend time. They are as much about our present condition as they are about things yet to come.

The truth is, for many in the world today, it does seem like the end and that all hope is gone. Wars, famines, refugee migrations, mass murders, genocide, pandemics, systemic racism, and civil unrest—when any of those events are happening to you and those around you and to those you love, then it really does feel like the end of the world as you have known it. Or perhaps in your own personal life you have experienced some traumatic event, some loss, some heartache which has caused you to lose hope and to despair and to feel as if the world has ended.

Jesus is saying to us today, “Do not just sit around waiting for a sign, waiting for me to return. Be awake, be alert and proclaim my Good News this very day to all those who have lost hope and only see a dark and bleak end. Those tragedies and troubles that we see and experience in the world today, and certainly there are many, are all powerful reminders that there is an urgent and immediate need in our world for a witness to God’s love, God’s forgiveness, and God’s reconciliation. As followers of Jesus, we are to be the ones who reveal that love, who offer that forgiveness and who strive for that reconciliation to all who are hurting, to all

those whose lives have been torn apart and to all those who are without hope. Today's Gospel is not about some far off "end time." The Gospel is God's call to bring his message of hope and healing to the world today.

I had the opportunity a number of years ago to visit the Coventry Cathedral. It was both a wonderful and yet very emotional experience. Immediately next to the bombed-out ruins of the old cathedral, a new cathedral has arisen. The new cathedral stands in sharp contrast to the old. It is a very modern looking building, consisting of sharp angles, colored glass and abstract art. Behind the altar there is an immense and beautiful tapestry of Christ in Glory that weighs more than a ton. But it is more than the immensity and the beauty that overwhelms you when you enter into Coventry Cathedral. You can feel and you can sense that something new and miraculous has risen on that Holy ground.

The cathedral is a symbol that out of the brokenness, the suffering, and the heartache, somehow, through the power of the risen Christ, we have the hope that all things will be made new. Someone wrote that to move from the bombed ruins to the new cathedral is to walk from Good Friday to Easter morning. That is what we believe and that is what we are to proclaim. Through the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit we move from the darkness and death and hopelessness of Good Friday to the glorious sunrise of Easter possibilities. We do not need to be fearful about the future, we need to be faithful in the present.

At the consecration as the Bishop of Coventry, the Right Reverend Simon Barrington-Ward spoke these words, "Coventry cathedral itself offers us a wonderful picture of what Christ's love could do in us. On the night after the bombing when the roof had gone and all those matchless pillars, arcades and clerestories lay on the ground in broken heaps, it took the eye of faith to see what yet could be... Out of the sore loss and brokenness was fashioned a new harmony, a new richness, the sign of a healing and reconciling influence was to reach out all over the world. That is what God's new love in Christ can do in us if we will yield ourselves to him. .
.Unquote.

We are about to end one year and begin a new one. None of us know what the future holds. Our country and our world face many challenges. Each of us will face our own personal challenges and struggles as well. Jesus says "Do not be afraid." God calls us to be a people of faith, not fear. God calls us to live today and everyday as the most important day in your life. Seize every opportunity to show love not fear. Live every day to practice forgiveness not hatred. Always seek reconciliation rather than recrimination. Strive to be a point of light offering hope to the hopeless.

There is a popular Southern Gospel hymn entitled, *Because He Lives*." The hymn contains these words, "Because He lives, I CAN face tomorrow, Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future. And life is worth the living just because He lives." May it be so with each of us. How will we live this day?

Amen.