

Sunday Sermon by Lauren Dockery

Sunday, November 14, 2021

Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done. Amen

In this passage, Jesus tells us that a beautiful and sacred building is going to crumble down. If you don't remember the history of this building, let me give you an overview. Stay with me because I'm going to cover centuries of history briefly. After the people of God were freed from Egypt and later given the 10 commandments from God at Mt. Siani, they roamed the desert for a generation looking for the promised land. And the entire time they were roaming they hulled the ten commandments in the Ark of the Covenant- a beautiful box made for carrying these heavy tablets that represented the relationship between God and the people. They made temporary worship tents in the desert and placed the Ark of the Covenant in those tents. But it wasn't until God gave them the promised land, and much later a king - a wise king named Solomon, who decided to build a temple, that there was a vision for a permanent home for this Ark of the Covenant. And it's important to know that in early Jewish theology, the thought was that where The Ark lived, was the only place where people could reach God directly. So wise King Solomon created a beautiful temple for the people to worship and pray and study, and for the Ark of the Covenant to live. Centuries go by. And there is great devastation. Invaders come in, destroy the temple and take the people as prisoners. They're exiled from their home and forced into servitude. In their despair some 30 years later, some people do the best they can to rebuild a modest temple, but it isn't until centuries later, some 60 years before Jesus was born - right around the time that Rome conquered the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem, that the temple architecture was completely overhauled. The new design included giant marble stones, balconies, and patios, covered walkways, luscious gardens. Gorgeous.

And that is where the disciples find themselves. A bunch of country fishermen in the big city, certainly not for the first time in their lives because it was customary to travel to the temple annually for Passover, but still- it's very different than where they're from and it's easy to ooh and ahh at the sights. But Jesus warns his followers "This place will fall."

This historical place. This sacred place. The place where his people have come to worship for centuries. Not a stone will be left upon another.

Imagine someone said that to you about this place. This beautiful building has been lovingly stewarded for 175 years! The place where our children were baptized and loved ones were laid to rest. A place with halls full of tears and laughter, friendship and love. It's as unfathomable to us that these walls would fall as it was for disciples looking stone upon stone upon stone.

There are times in all of our lives when the bottom drops out. Where things are worse than we thought possible. Some people spend their whole lives like this, on the edge of disaster after disaster- stuck in systems of poverty and oppression where they can't catch a break, others are trapped in dangerous places surrounded by wars, or famines, or brutal weather. These people expect disaster. For others, tragedy comes in unanticipated waves. Diligent people with privilege have planned for and fought to prevent catastrophe. But still inevitable suffering touches all lives. Columbia Theological Seminary professor Rodger Nishioka says witnessing calamity and destruction brings a loss of innocence. It takes

away our hope that the world is safe, that systems will protect us, that our lives even matter or mean anything to God.

As scary as this sounds, this is a hopeful message. Jesus is reminding us that we are not called to love things as they are and accept them as good. Instead, it's our duty as Christians to imagine things how they could be and to continue to pray for God's Kingdom to come and God's will to be done. Jesus is telling us that salvation is a process that requires repentance and return before resurrection. Reading this passage is an invitation to explore how our actions contribute to others' loss of innocence. How are we complicit in issues like climate change, economic inequality, and oppression of others?

Don't misunderstand me- I'm not saying that we are being punished with disaster. I'm saying that disaster is a great time to remember that God is committed to healing the world's brokenness. It's a time to remember that God's grace and love for us is moving the world.

The temple will crumble but this is the beginning of the birth pangs. God is in labor to bring the world salvation and all things will be made new. Amen.