

Carried by Faith

11/13/2022

Luke 21:5-19

Last week, we spoke about “hope” and how it has the power to carry us forward through even the most seemingly impossible situations, whether that’s McDonalds running out of mystery meat for the McRib or being diagnosed with an incurable illness. Hope has the power to help us see beyond the present moment, to see the forest beyond the trees and realize that life goes on, to know that what has happened in the past and what currently is will not always be. So, there’s no denying that “hope” is a powerful thing, but where does hope come from? In other words, when all seems to be lost, when the world seems to be turned upside down and inside out, how do we find it within ourselves to have hope that “this too shall pass” and to carry forward, even in the face of what today’s story marks as the signs of the end of days?

Jesus speaks not of forgiveness, resurrection, or things for which to have hope. Rather, he speaks of destruction, persecution, war, and false prophets. We read this laundry list of things to happen and we are disturbed, not just because Jesus diverts from his usual warm and fluffy messages nor just because these images are something out of a horror movie, but because these signs are things we are seeing around us right here and right now.

Let’s consider our current world for just a moment. Jesus speaks of “war,” and much of the world is mentally preparing for what might be World War III with the U.S. fighting not only China in defense of Taiwan but potentially also the U.S. along with NATO alongside Ukraine against Russia. What’s more, the political division in our country that has seemingly deepened over the last many years and that has been made rather obvious by the recent midterm elections has many scholars predicting that our country is on course for a second Civil War. Then, in addition to war, Jesus speaks of natural disasters. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita beyond devastated the Gulf Coast back in 2005, and that area’s hit without fail ever year by hurricanes of varying categories. Also, there doesn’t seem to be a year without wildfires along the western coast of our nation, and Australia has seen its fair share of wildfires in recent years as well. As if that weren’t enough, the polar icecaps are melting at an alarming rate. On top of that, there are always children starving in Africa, there are areas of the world where certain religious groups (even Christians) are persecuted to this day, and false prophets abound, not just in the sense of the televangelists preaching the prosperity gospel but those who weaponize Scripture to support their own hatred of others. Very truly, our world is just fraught with very real occurrences of these signs of which Jesus speaks. So much so do we see these signs playing out around us that it’s enough to start believing those saying that “the end is nigh.” However, this is not the point Jesus is actually trying to make.

While it sounds like Jesus is trying to scare people into believing and start counting down the days until the world gets sucked into oblivion, that’s not the point. Rather, Jesus’ message here is a two-fold message of hope. On the one hand, he speaks of these things not as signs of the end but rather as indicators of a new beginning. These horrible things will happen, yes, but when they do, what comes next will be even better than anything our human minds can imagine or have ever seen. Very truly, they are signs of God’s power and reign. Nothing we do will prevent or expedite their happening. God is in control of this world, no matter who or what we may give power at a given time. No matter what we do or how much we divert from the trail God has laid before us, the will of God will be done. With these destructions will come the ushering in of the new age, where the New Heaven and New Earth are one. At that time,

beginnings will be brought out of ends, life out of death, hope out of despair. These signs will be signs of God's power, a power in which we are to have faith, Jesus' second point.

Jesus speaks these words upon witnessing the admiration of the architectural structures of the Temple and Jerusalem. Those admiring these buildings are essentially saying, "How great are the hands that laid these stones and built these buildings. How great are the minds that envisioned this holy city and central structure?" Their eyes have been diverted to honor and praise the minds that thought of these buildings, the hands that built them, the persons who rule and run these buildings and cities, forgetting the mind and hands that built the world in seven days, that envisioned humans, the human conscience, free will, and more. They admire the power of princes, kings and religious elite, forgetting the power wielded by God. What Jesus, therefore, points to is the frailty of the people's faith. The physical structures will wear and degrade with time, but God will continue to stand firm from everlasting to everlasting. People die, and the powers of those people last only as long as they are given that power, but God and God's power are eternal and absolute, continuing regardless of if we give it to Them or not. Jesus is calling people, then, to have faith not in the powers that be but faith in God.

If we have faith in God and God's will, we can come to know that this too shall pass. If we have faith in God, then we can come to know salvation is ours to be had. If we have faith in God's power, we rest assured that our life will have no end and new life shall be brought out of our deaths. If we have faith, not in the powers that be, but in God, we find the capacity to have hope. With that hope, we are able to face and persist through any and all hardships of our time. False prophets will rise and fall, but God and Their truth will persevere. Natural disasters will shape and reshape the earth, but God's Creation will never lose its beauty. Famine and poverty will persist, but in the end, all will be equally filled and everyone will be made equally rich, whether it be in faith, in hope, or in love. Wars will rage, but righteousness and peace will win in the end. Despite the wills of human figures, God's will will be done, and out of what destruction may lie ahead will come the New Heaven and the New Earth. Out of oblivion will come eternity. All we need to get there is a little faith and hope. Do you have faith?