

Homily for November 13, 2022

Luke 21:5-19

Today's gospel reading makes me think of that questionable old piece of folk wisdom, that if you find yourself in the midst of troubles, all you have to do is look around and realize that there's always someone else worse off than you are....as if that fact should somehow suddenly make you **thankful** that your troubles are so minuscule compared to theirs....(thankful or guilty, I'm not sure which). I don't know about you, but whenever I'm in the middle of some kind of major life crisis, it's not exactly comforting to think about someone else's troubles and how they exceed my own. Truth be told, I want the freedom to wallow in my own discomfort and tragedy for a while, without being urged to see them as irrational self-absorption.

If we are to be perfectly honest about it, resting in the pit of despair is sometimes a strangely comfortable place to be. And I do know a bit about this – because like most everyone else, I've been there. I'm not at all afraid to admit that I've occasionally enjoyed a good wallow in the overwhelming feeling that life has conspired against me, and singled me out for particular devastation. That's what happens, isn't it, when the future doesn't unfold exactly as we had imagined, when we're suddenly faced with the prospect of unwelcome change, like when the news from the doctor isn't good either for ourselves or for a loved one; or when news reports feed us second and third helpings of unmitigated disasters both political and natural; or when we look around our beloved church and see pews that used to be full, and wonder what they will look like in 5 years' time.

In all spheres of life, when disruption happens as it inevitably does, our only real choice is to face an uncertain future with grace, and trust that grace will be there to see us through whatever challenges and changes lie ahead. Wallowing, I would suggest, is both wonderful and necessary as a brief exercise in looking into that pit of despair to see what's lurking down there, but as a permanent resting place, it's not what we're ultimately called to as people of faith. We aren't called to stay hung up on our Good Friday crosses when we're perpetually called to the new life of Easter morning, whatever that may be, whatever that may look like, and whatever adaptations or changes that may require.

Well, back to our gospel reading. It's broadly accepted that St. Luke wrote the words of warning and exhortations of endurance that we just heard around 85 AD, when life was extremely unstable for the young Church. The Temple in Jerusalem that had been at the centre of Jewish religious and cultural life had been destroyed in the uprising between 66-70 AD when the Jews tried to take back control of their country from the Romans. They failed in this courageous effort, and people – both Jews and the early Christians - were exiled and dispersed; and life as they knew it changed, permanently and irrevocably. So, in Luke's telling, out of Jesus' mouth a few decades before all of that happened had come words of warning about the chaos and

destruction to come; and in particular about the fate of those identified as followers of Jesus who could expect betrayal, hate, persecution and death.

So, uncomfortable as it is to be living through this present unstable phase of life in the Church and in the world today, it sure wouldn't have been any picnic back then, and I suppose we could get lost in the comparison between then and now and think that well, maybe we don't really have it so bad after all. But if we did that, we'd miss the point of the gospel – because the real message isn't in the warning, but in the exhortation to faith and the message of hope contained therein. “Not a hair of your head will perish” – what a supremely eloquent way of affirming, as Julian of Norwich would say, that ultimately **“all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”** In other words, it's pretty unstable and chaotic now, but in the fullness of time, we'll understand.

That of course is the most familiar quotation of hers – but Julian also wrote this profound statement of faith that was revealed to her during one of her many mystical encounters with the Divine: **“See that I am God. See that I am in everything. See that I do everything. See that I have never stopped ordering my works, nor ever shall, eternally. See that I lead everything on to the conclusion I ordained for it before time began, by the same power, wisdom and love with which I made it. How can anything be amiss?”** So – while on one hand we can – and should - grieve and storm and protest against circumstances that make us legitimately fearful of the future, by the same token we're called to believe that God is continually in the process of creating, and re-creating both the Church and the world....in which we get to both participate and facilitate in God's name.

In 2008 while on a trip to the Holy Land, I stood beside, and touched, and prayed at that piece of the destroyed temple in Jerusalem that is known as the Western Wall - and I have to say, it ranks among the most powerful experiences of my life. That relatively short remaining section of wall serves as a stark reminder that towers and temples – everything of humankind's creation, in fact – will inevitably fall. We are bound up in the circle of life and death, which has rhythms of stability, and rhythms of instability....and the **only** thing that remains constant throughout it all is the unshakeable love and compassion of the Creator whose purposes we may not immediately comprehend, but whose grace and peace and creative energy in the eye of the storm never fail. In thankfulness we say Amen.