

Endurance: Where Love Reveals Our Souls

Bible reference for sermon: Luke 21:5–19

Jesus said, ⁶ “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” ⁷ They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” ⁸ And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them.

Grace and peace to you from the One who sustains us, who gives us courage when we are afraid, and who promises to be with us always. Amen.

There's a saying Christians sometimes toss around: “Jesus never promised it would be easy.” Often, it's delivered with a knowing smile, like a shared inside joke. But when we come to today's Gospel reading, this truth takes a far more serious tone. Jesus is preparing his followers for a future filled with upheaval, and he isn't sugarcoating anything. For months now we have followed Jesus as he journeyed toward Jerusalem—a journey marked not by triumph but by a steady movement into conflict. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus “set his face” toward Jerusalem—an act of fierce resolve. And as he walked into danger, his disciples walked with him. Sometimes they were faithful, sometimes fearful, and often confused—just like we can be. Now at last, they arrive in Jerusalem. The crowds that once shouted, “Blessed is the king!” are already fading. The tension in the air is thick. Perhaps trying to lighten the moment, some of the disciples point out how beautiful the temple is, how massive and impressive its stones are. They are making small talk, maybe trying to find something stable to cling to in a moment of anxiety.

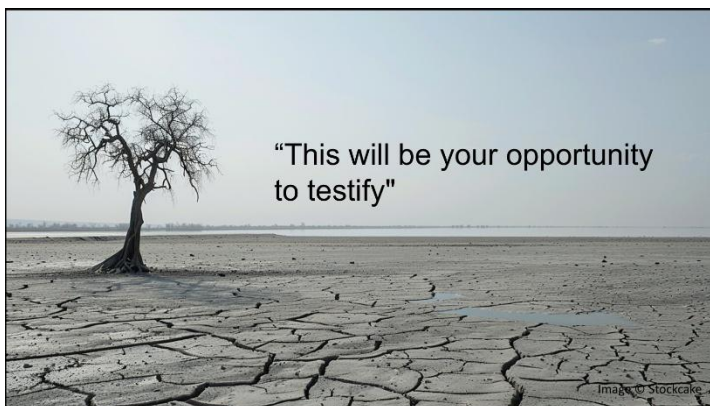
But Jesus responds by saying, “All of this will be thrown down.” He isn't attacking their appreciation of beauty. He is naming a coming crisis not just for the temple, but for their faith itself.



For the Jewish people, the temple wasn't simply a beautiful building. It was a symbol of God's dwelling among them, a sign that God protected them and anchored them. If the temple stood firm, surely the world made sense. But Jesus tells them that even this sacred structure is not everlasting. Even the most impressive stones we place our faith in can fall. And when they do, Jesus asks: What will your faith be built on then?

That is a question for us as well. We love our stones—our routines, our stability, the comforts that make us feel secure. We want to believe that the world we know will always remain as it is. We want faith to be something stable we can hold onto. But what happens when life becomes unpredictable? When institutions fail? When the church changes? When democracy trembles? When global crises disrupt everything, we've assumed about the future? Jesus names all of that. He speaks of wars and earthquakes, betrayals and fear. It is not a pleasant picture. Yet Jesus does not say these things to intimidate us. He says them because he loves us enough to tell the truth: discipleship has a cost. And love—real love—is never risk-free.

But here is the crucial thing: Jesus also tells the disciples that such events do not signal the end of all things. These are birth pangs—signs that something new is struggling to be born. That the Christian story is not about God destroying what God has made—it is about God transforming it. Throughout scripture, God creates life from chaos again and again. Jesus wants his followers to understand that even when their world seems to be falling apart, God is still working. Resurrection follows crucifixion. Hope rises from devastation. Love outlasts every collapse. The faithful response to crisis is not fear, not retreat, not clinging to what used to be. The faithful response is readiness for what God is bringing to life next.



"This will be your opportunity to testify"

In the midst of struggle, Jesus gives his followers a surprising promise: "This will be your opportunity to testify." When the world feels uncertain. When people are hurting. When we are navigating deep change. That is precisely when our witness matters most. Jesus does not

expect us to have all the answers. He does not require us to explain why suffering exists. He doesn't ask us to pretend everything is fine. He simply asks us to show up, with compassion and grit, and speak truth about God's love. Testimony is not about defending God. It is about revealing God. It is kindness made visible. It is solidarity with the vulnerable. It is loving the neighbour others overlook. It is living as if God is real, present, and active—and trusting that God is already working in places where we fear the future most.

Jesus assures the disciples that when the moment comes to speak, he will give words and wisdom. What a relief that is for us—especially when fear makes us feel unprepared or unqualified.

Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will speak through us when we take a stand for justice, when we comfort someone in grief, when we advocate for the marginalized, when we counter hatred with hope. This is not a burden placed on us. It is a gift. Endurance, Jesus says, is not about muscling through difficulty. It is about trusting that God's strength is already within us. It is holding on to love because Christ is holding on to us.

But Jesus is also realistic about how hard this can be. He warns that discipleship might cost relationships—that even family can become divided over what following Jesus looks like. And many of us already know that pain. Families disagree about politics, about racial justice, about climate responsibility, about whether queer people are beloved of God, about the worth and dignity of refugees and immigrants. Sometimes, standing up for the vulnerable leads to tension with those closest to us. Jesus doesn't say this to encourage division, but to name a painful truth: when love expands its boundaries, those who prefer narrower walls may resist. Yet Jesus stands with those who choose compassion over approval. If following Christ's justice costs us comfort, we do not lose family; we find a wider one—God's family, where every person belongs.

And then Jesus gives us this promise: "By your endurance you will gain your souls." He is not suggesting a spiritual contest to see who can survive the longest. He is promising that faithfulness in struggle shapes us into who we are meant to be.

Our souls—the God-image at our very core—are revealed when we trust in God's presence instead of our own certainty. Endurance in the Christian life is not about being strong. It is about staying grounded in love. It is about learning that hope is not fragile. It is about discovering that when our foundations shake, God is not confined to the structures we built. God is in the movement, in the disruption, in the possibility of new creation.

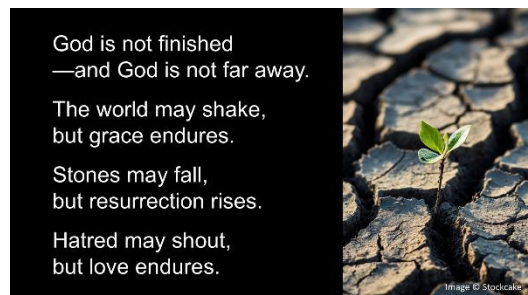


Jesus is not threatening the world—he is liberating it. When Jesus speaks about unreliable structures falling, he is not forecasting catastrophe for its own sake. He is revealing that systems that harm people are not eternal. The temple, after all, was not only a house of prayer; it had also become a symbol of power that excluded the poor and marginalized. So when Jesus says its stones will fall, he is declaring that no institution—religious or political—gets to take the place of God. Today, Jesus might say that the systems that profit from suffering, that value property more than people, that divide communities and nations, that deny climate responsibility, or that judge some as less worthy of dignity—these too will fall. And their collapse, while unsettling, is actually grace. God is not invested in preserving what harms God's children.

We often imagine discipleship as something we do for a season—when we feel inspired, when church life is calm, when the world behaves predictably. But Jesus calls us to be followers for the duration—especially when the future feels uncertain. Faith is not just for the good days. It is for the complicated ones. It is for the days when love demands more from us than we think we can give. It is for the days when hope feels like defiance. It is for the days when endurance means trusting that God will carry us before we can walk on our own again.

So what does testimony look like today? It may mean refusing to look away from injustice. It may mean welcoming the refugee. It may mean resisting lies that devalue God's creation. It may mean telling a hurting friend, "You are loved, you belong, and you are not alone." Testimony is not a speech—it is a life shaped by resurrection hope. It is a declaration that love will have the final word.

Jesus never promised it would be easy. But he promised to be with us—right here in the heart of uncertainty. He promised that fear will not define us. He promised that the Spirit will give us courage. He promised that even as stones fall, God's presence will remain. And he promised that if we keep showing up, keep loving, keep enduring, our souls will be found and strengthened in the very moments when the world feels most fragile.



So when life trembles, don't assume God is absent. When institutions collapse, don't assume faith is gone. When the future feels unclear, don't assume the story is over. Instead, hear Jesus speaking softly and clearly: "This is your opportunity to testify." To insist on hope. To choose compassion. To stay grounded in love.

Because God is not finished—and God is not far away. The world may shake, but grace endures. Stones may fall, but resurrection rises. Hatred may shout, but love—God's love—endures longer and louder.

Let us be witnesses to that love. Let us endure in that hope. And in the endurance Christ gives us, may we gain our very souls. Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>