

I want to begin by setting the Gospel Jim just read in context. The 21st chapter of Luke is the last chapter before the account of the passion begins. The 22nd chapter opens with the priests and the scribes plotting to put Jesus to death. Before the portion read this morning, chapter 21 opens with the story of the widow's mite:

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."

Now, I know some of you are sitting there thinking, how predictable, what a cliché! He made the Stewardship announcement last week so, even though it is not actually in the reading appointed for today, he had to haul in the story of the widow's mite to chivy us on stewardship yet again. But that is not the main reason, I bring in the widow to this homily. It is the way her commitment and faith relates to what Jesus requires of us all later in the reading when he speaks of the commitment, faith, and endurance that will be required of those who would follow him:

You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.

So what about Jesus prediction' of the destruction of the Temple. The Temple in question is known as the second Temple or the Herodian Temple. You will recall that the first temple was caused to be built by King Solomon, after his father King David was instructed by God not to build the Temple, but to let the Temple wait for his son to order it built. The Temple was, of course, among others things, to be a home for the Ark of the Covenant.

Solomon's Temple was destroyed as was the entire city of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE. The Judeans were deported to Babylon – an exile that would last some 70 years.

Our reading from Isaiah is foretelling the recreation of Jerusalem which included the building of the second Temple between 521 and 516 BCE. The Ark of the Covenant was never recovered. In 19 BCE, King Herod the Great began a major renovation and expansion of the second Temple, hence the second Temple coming to be known as the Herodian Temple. That is the Temple, Jesus knew; and that is the Temple, Jesus, in the passage this morning foretells its destruction. And that is the Temple that, together with much of the rest of the city of Jerusalem, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

Now it is important that I say something about Luke. Luke was most probably a gentile and he is commonly thought to have been a physician. He not only wrote the Gospel that bears his name, but he also wrote the Book of Acts which chronicles the early history of the fledgling, mostly gentile, church. The Gospel of Luke was written in around the year 85 CE, some 15 years after the Romans destroyed the Temple and roughly 50 some years after the Romans crucified Jesus.

Whether Jesus actually said *...the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down* is open to debate. The key point is that Luke, as he wrote his Gospel, knew well the Temple was gone. Not one stone was left upon another. Chaos reigned in Judea under a hard brutal, occupation which stopped at nothing to put down resistance. Luke sought to show believers a road forward and to assure those believers that God was with them no matter how bleak things were.

Let us pause a moment to review the focus of each of the 4 Gospels. I rely on the analysis of Alexander John Shaia a Lebanese-American theologian whose work gives me a way of giving a very quick

summary. Mark the earliest Gospel is about moving through suffering, Matthew is about living with change, John the latest of the Gospels is about how we receive joy. Written roughly at the same time as Matthew, Luke is about how do we mature in service, how do we move forward regardless of how difficult the circumstances.

Let me remind you that the Gospels are not history. They are narratives with theological purpose to illumine the salvation offered by Jesus. The Gospels were written long after Paul's letters and even longer after the resurrection.

Luke in both his Gospel and in Acts was writing for a small and beleaguered community of gentile followers of Jesus. Our passage this morning cautions against false prophets, warns that persecution will occur, signals that wars and violence are happening and will happen, says that execution is not only possible but likely. But regardless of all the horror *not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.* Our passage reads all this as prediction, but 50 years on from the resurrection, it was the reality early Christians lived on a daily basis. It was for this much threatened community Luke wrote his Gospel. Among those early Christians there were both Jews and gentiles, but Jewish Christians eventually assimilated. While those Jews who were not followers of the Way, also found a way to preserve their identity and beliefs largely because of the Pharisees. The Pharisees replaced Temple Judaism in the absence of a Temple with the Judaism of the synagogue. So they were not always the bad guys! That is a topic for a different homily.

So what does all this mean for us 2000 + years later?

Well we may not realize it, but all of us older than 50 have witnessed the destruction of a third temple. That temple had many buildings in many places, that temple paid homage to Jerusalem but had only a

small presence in the Holy City, that temple was about power, domination, and exploitation. That temple was called Christendom, and we have witnessed its last days. For many of us, we can only respond with, Thanks be to God.

Before any of you scream heresy, or rush out from the building, or if you have a Presbyterian background, fling your stool at me like a latter day Jenny Geddeses, I am talking about the last days of Christendom, not of Christianity. Indeed, I am talking about Christianity's renewal and rebirth – a new heaven and a new earth as Isaiah promised – a Christianity unburdened from supporting empire and unjust political order.

Think of our past, our public school days began with the Lord's Prayer, at age 9, we were given Gideon Bible's New Testament again in public schools. Neither Parliament nor the Provincial Legislature could open without a captive cleric to give a Christian prayer regardless of the religion or lack thereof of the members. The Anglican Church was know particularly as the Conservative Party at prayer. We still have largely only "Christian" holy days as holidays which largely has turned out to be a prime benefit for consumerism. That the Easter Bunny has more currency than an empty cross says so much about how it all has become cheapened.

In the 2021 Census in Greater Victoria more than 62% of people reported that they had no religion – not that they weren't Christians, they had no religion. That is both good and sad news. Good because they have seen through the fraudulent claims of Christendom: the persecution, the exploitation, and the diminishment of other. Sad news because they are adrift with little to help them achieve some level of spiritual health, hence the Easter Bunny and all manner of things that trivialize a human need for meaning.

Why did it all happen?

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Some of you will know that in 312 CE, Constantine, hitherto a persecutor of Christians, faced a decisive battle in his quest for power at the Milvian Bridge. The night before the battle Constantine saw in the sky a vision of the cross. He caused to be painted on his soldiers' shields the Chi Rho, the first two letters of Christ in Greek. He triumphed in the battle which led to his becoming Emperor and his embracing Christianity. For centuries the church has regarded the event as a triumph with the conversion of Constantine. When, in fact, it was when Christianity was first co-opted in the service of tyranny and power – painfully, not by a long chalk, the last time. Think of the appalling horror of the crusades, think of two millennia of murderous antisemitism, think of 19th century imperialism. I remember singing with pious gusto:

From Greenland's icy mountains, from India's coral strand,
Where Africa's sunny fountains roll down their golden sand;
From many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver their land from error's chain.
Shall we, whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high,
Shall we to men benighted the lamp of life deny?
Salvation! O salvation! The joyful sound proclaim,
Till earth's remotest nation has learned Messiah's name.

Meanwhile their resources, their labour, and their very bodies were ours to exploit to make at least some in our homelands richer.

Now Christendom perverted Christianity, but it did not defeat it. All the while faithful souls, saints, martyrs, servants of Christ kept the flame of Christ's salvation alive even as it was overshadowed by triumphalism and the extolling of power and empire.

We have only begun in Canada, in “British Columbia” to try to atone for our sins and those of our forbears. We have only begun to understand that the first peoples of these lands knew better than we how to understand Micah, without even knowing the prophet:

**He has told you, O mortal, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?**

So who are we, we who now follow Jesus post Christendom? We are like those early Christians, adrift in a world of growing terrors that make the tumult Jesus predicts in our lection seem small if only because our terrors are global not local. We know God’s creation has never been more threatened by our greed and our quest for riches and comfort, and while we may no longer wish to conquer, through our monopolization of the world’s resources, we make the futures of the poorest in this world ever more doubtful and ever more painful. We are in a time when much of the world is rearming with weapons of lethal and completely amoral capacities to destroy. And many who purport to share our faith make the most heinous, violent, murderous statements towards others, including many of us. What are we to do?

Only this, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself. Easy to say, orders of magnitude harder to do. But that is how Christianity, freed from Christendom, freed from power, freed from domination, freed from supposition of superiority will be truly revived. It is our challenge and it can be our salvation and that of many more than we. Maybe that can be the fourth and best

Temple – a network of faithful people all over the world committed to love of God and neighbour, no matter how hard.

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**The wolf and the lamb shall feed together;
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.**

Who knows, if we love well enough, maybe even the serpent will dine on better than dust.

Now those of you who were listening most carefully, may have noted that in disavowing obvious intent with the passage on the widow's mite, I was careful to say that it was not my main intent. However, I would be remiss, if I did not remind you that the Stewardship packages were picked up by many last week, and for those of you who were not here, they are in the narthex for you to pick up today. We are all asked to have them back next Sunday for their presentation in the offering on the Feast of the Reign of Christ, the last Sunday of the Christian Year. We make our commitments of time, talent, and money because we are committed to building a new heaven and a new earth, together in community, with Gods help.

Amen.