

Let us pray,

Lord, give us the endurance to walk through this life with grace and mercy, even when things get tough.

Amen.

I wonder if this is the message that broke the camels back?

I wonder if this was the moment where many of Jesus' followers decided, this life of discipleship is just too hard, I am out.

Jesus says:

"You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 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."

This Christian thing sounds amazing!

NOT.

If I spoke like this today, people would be calling me crazy and a radical.

People would claim that I am going too far, asking too much, that I have lost my mind.

And yet, our Lord, Jesus Christ is telling his followers that if they follow the way of his teaching, they have a good chance of being persecuted and betrayed and even put to death.

But the thing that we have to understand is that if Jesus truly was who he said he was and death is not the end, than what happens to us in this life, is a small price to pay for the glory that is found in heaven.

This isn't to say that Jesus likes our suffering, Jesus himself didn't want to suffer on the cross.

But for the pursuit of bringing heaven to earth, suffering is an inevitable byproduct of that goal.

Jesus is trying to remind us that God is not found in the temple, with its beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God.

Buildings, relics, physical items will decay and will not last forever.

So therefore we should be more concerned about preserving our souls than we are about preserving our physical stuff, and for Jesus that includes our own bodies.

This isn't to say that Jesus doesn't want us to take care of our stuff and our bodies.

He certainly does, we are called to be good stewards or caretakers of what God has given us to take care of.

But we should not be sacrificing our souls for the sake of taking care of the material.

Jesus would much rather us sacrifice the material than our souls.

Think of it this way.

We could have all of the riches in the world, but if we are not happy internally, no amount of things, or stuff will make us happy.

Some of the most joyful people are those who have almost nothing.

Why?

Because they prioritize their minds and their souls rather than material goods.

Again, its not like material things are bad.

They aren't.

But they can become bad when we see them as greater than that which makes them great.

God and our souls.

Another example is that if church becomes more about maintaining a building than maintaining relationships, we have lost the point.

Not that maintaining a building is bad.

Because we need buildings, we need places to gather.

But that is all they are.

They are tools and vehicles for what really matters.

Relationship.

Relationship with God and with each other.

Jesus is reminding us that there are so many things out in the world that will and are trying to steal our attention.

There are horrible atrocities, war, insurrections, betrayal, murder, unjust trials and everything else one could imagine.

And yet Jesus says, do not be terrified.

Not because they aren't terrifying, but that they distract us from our ultimate goal as Christ followers.

To spread the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ that God loves this world and that God's mercy knows no boundaries.

Here is what the gospel boils down to:

Jesus is asking us, where is our focus.

We can get caught up in material things, in the evils of this world, in preserving the way things use to be.

Or,

What Jesus would prefer, if we followed the guidance of the spirit and moved the world forward to heaven on earth.

To freeing people who are in bondage.

To providing justice to those who are experiencing injustice.

To feeding the hungry.

To loving the outcast, immigrant, enemy, foreigner, and other.

To clothing the naked.

To housing the unhoused.

Don't let the evils of this world distract you from the mission you promised to be a part of in your baptism.

Don't let the evils in this world steal the joy of the resurrection.

Don't let the evils of this world distract you from loving God and neighbor like brother and sister.

Remember, when Jesus' life was taken from him, he didn't let their evil make him evil.

Instead, he chose to forgive and to freely give up his life so that others may live.

His focus never wained, my ours never either.

“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Amen.