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Church of the Holy Spirit
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Luke 21:5-19

Jesus's lesson today is frightening. After he says everything will cease to be, he adds, "Don't worry." It's all going according to plan. Isn't the Gospel supposed to be full of good things? This message doesn't exactly seem like good news.

True, this lesson isn't positive, uplifting, or reassuring for the status quo. The Temple was important to the Jews in Jerusalem; like this structure, it was a place where people invested not only time, talent, and treasure, but also sweat and tears, both of joy and hope.

If Jesus said this to us this morning, I wouldn't worry; I'd totally freak out. In my head, I'd be saying: "I just got here; this place better not fall apart! Is God's plan really to destroy everything we've made?

Christ's message is intended to be prophetic and applicable in every generation. A reminder that everything people build is temporary. We know this to be true. The nature of our culture is that "THE thing" this year will inevitably be replaced by "The NEXT big thing".

It isn't like God is on the A-Team, "loves it when a plan comes together," and stands aside smoking a cigar while the Temple crumbles. By its very nature, what the world glorifies fades away. All that humanity has built falls apart, and this destruction prepares the way for a future yet to be imagined.

In the imaginations of their hearts, people generally lean towards fear rather than hope. There may be more pessimists than optimists in the world, but that isn't how Jesus wants his followers to contemplate, dream, or imagine what will come in the age to come.

Taking the half-full/half-empty glass, so often used to determine if one views the world as a pessimist or an optimist. Jesus would argue that, in this case, it doesn't matter whether it is full or empty, because the glass will be destroyed.

Jesus knows that some folks will wring their hands, saying, "I don't know how to drink without a glass," and be thirsty. While others will instead recognize that, even without the glass, they will still need to drink, and will adapt, imagine, and regroup to quench their thirst.

Avoiding destruction, death, and decay will not change their eventuality.

Even Jesus stood in the Second Temple. A structure that had been rebuilt on the Holy Hill after centuries. And we know that, like the original, it was also destroyed; now all that remains is the Western Wall.
Jesus encourages his followers to be prepared for what happens when (not if) the things they are invested in no longer exist.

Human beings have the choice. Attempting to avoid and ignore life's transitory nature leaves them in the shadow of fear over the uncertainty of when death will come, rather than living courageously in the fullness of belief in the resurrection and eternal life.

If Jesus were here today, he might not say "Do not be afraid"; instead, perhaps he would say "Be brave." We live in what has often been referred to as unprecedented times. There are natural disasters and human-caused violence that seem to run rampant over the earth. It can seem like everything is falling apart, and there is nothing we can do to stop it. This life we live can be overwhelming to the point of paralysis.

What Jesus is trying to instill in his followers is that when fear controls the narrative, when anxiety guides action, and when self-preservation becomes the ultimate goal, it isn't Good News.

I live with an anxiety disorder, so sometimes I sit up at night, worrying about all the what-ifs. With regular therapy, medication, and support over the years, I have become more capable of navigating the changes and chances of life and can choose what to focus on - fear or hope; scarcity or abundance; death or life.

When my answers are fear, scarcity, and death, I attempt to shift my perspective and find hope, abundance, and life. I can't, however, always change my perspective easily, which is one of the reasons I find it so helpful to be part of a community of faith. In the Body of Christ, the Church, no one is left alone. Weekly, we come together in the presence of God, of one another, and of the community at large to dream a new world into being by doing the work we have been given to do.

As Jesus' disciples, learning about one another, their strengths and weaknesses, and coming to know and love not just the God who created us out of love, but also one another, we can recognize when someone says or does outrageous things, they may be afraid, anxious, or doubtful. The responsibility falls on all those in the communion of saints to call one another in, engage in loving conversations, and help reorient one another's thinking. While we all experience fear, we are called to respond to it with bravery because Christ reminds and forms us to choose to live in faith and hope.

When worries are voiced and doubts arise, and go unacknowledged, they become like boogeymen hiding under the bed. By expressing fear, doubt, despair, and anxiety, we neutralize the hold they attempt to keep over us. Instead, when we come together and are fully present with another in worship, formation, fellowship, and service, we can grow in love, find sustaining hope, and recognize that there is no fear greater than God's love for us. This, in essence, shines light into the dark corners where that boogeyman hides, scheming and hoping we are weak, frightened, and alone.

But we are never truly alone; it is the Church's goal not to let fear lead to panic.

When Jesus stood in the Temple speaking about earthquakes, floods, famines, and plagues, the disciples began to strategize. When will this come to be, Lord? How can we prepare?

But Jesus doesn't want disciples who waste their time and energy worrying about how to prepare for the destruction of the things THEY have built. They are only stones upon stones after all. Jesus wants those who love him to put their faith in things eternal. To be prepared for the end of those things which are meant to pass away, but not to obsess over it, control it, or be consumed by it.

Building trust that allows people to be truly present with one another takes time. In communities, there are often varying degrees of trust. Here, some of you have known one another for years, and relationships that inspire others to trust in this community and in the Lord. While others are new here, like me, and are figuring out how to build those kinds of vulnerable, honest, open, and hopeful relationships without knowing clearly where the future may lead.

Truthfully, no one controls when the end will come: for ourselves, the things we build, or anything else we claim as "ours". When we focus on our own legacies rather than God's continued presence in future generations, we make the good news about "preservation" rather than "preparation."

The Good News that Jesus preached in today's Gospel isn't comfortable or comforting - it is a reminder that all that we have been, all that we are, all that we will be is meant to be shared in common with our sibling saints. So that we may be in the presence of God, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, and in the household of Jesus. All labor is not in vain, as Christians who invest our bodies, minds, and spirits in service to the Lord, we do so knowing that the Holiest of Sanctuaries is not built stone upon stone, but soul upon soul.

This is the nature of divine inheritance: we live in a world not dreamed of by our ancestors, and future generations will exist in a future yet unimagined. To everything there is a season, and there is no need to fear.

The time will come when all we have and all we are will be dust. God is immortal, invisible, loving, and wise, and has provided The Church as an eternal and indestructible home for all who seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving their neighbor as themselves and respecting the dignity of every human being. In other words, all who desire to live, not in fear, but to bravely live into their baptismal promises, are welcome to God's home, where all fears subside and even the most vivid imaginations cannot reflect the brilliance that is to come. What "is" will pass away, and what "will be" is still to be seen. Let us be present with one another in this moment, knowing that it is fleeting, but that doesn't make it any less precious, valued, or essential.

Amen