

Malachi 3:13-4:2a, 5-6  
Psalm 98  
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13  
Luke 21:5-19

Well, that was a lovely gospel reading this morning. . . Did you really hear what Jesus says today? The poor disciples. They are finally in Jerusalem after a long journey from Galilee. They are in Jerusalem in time for the Passover festival (every faithful Jew travels to Jerusalem every year for Passover). They are gathered at the temple. The disciples simply remark on the beauty of the temple. And Jesus – out of nowhere – says:

‘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.’ Wow.

And then Jesus predicts calamity: ‘When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for *these things must take place first*. Jesus doesn’t say they might happen. . . he says they must happen. And this is what must happen: ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.’ Jesus goes on to predict persecution of those who follow him. His followers will be betrayed “even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends.”

I don’t know that I like hearing any of this. Do you?

I mean really. We are sitting here four days before Thanksgiving. Truly, I don’t want to hear this Scripture this morning. In fact, I spent a great deal of time wrestling with this sermon. What are we to make of this gospel reading? It meant a lot in the time it was written. But what does it mean for us today? Jesus explicitly says: “these things – wars, earthquakes, plagues and persecution – these things must happen.” How must this ruin happen today? To us? Where is the Good News in any of that?

Well, we can trust that there is always Good News in the Gospels. Sometimes the Good News is just a little hard to discern. Sometimes the good news is not what we expect.

This morning’s gospel doesn’t sound like what we might expect. It sounds more like Holy Week than Thanksgiving. But the lectionary is actually put together for a reason – the readings take us on a journey through the Church year and through Jesus’ life. So, we do well to pay attention even if we don’t like it. The text is pointing us to something that requires our

consideration. My homiletics professor says to pay attention to where the text “pinches your foot.” We often find new insight in our discomfort, and this insight can be transforming.

We can gain insight this morning by going back to the consideration of why we read this text this morning. Where are we on the journey of the church year? Where is Jesus taking us?

We are in the 28<sup>th</sup> week of the season of Pentecost. We have been reading the Gospel of Luke since last December. The Church’s cycle of time is not the same as our calendar year. The Church’s new year begins at Advent – just after Thanksgiving on the first Sunday of December. Advent is the time to wait for Christ. But we’re not there yet. First we have to finish the season of Pentecost. With this gospel reading, we are reminded to look at difficulty. We are told to expect difficulty. The gospel today tells us that there is a cost to being a disciple: persecution and betrayal. We are reminded of this as we get ready for a new year. Just as we cannot get to Easter without Good Friday, we are reminded that there is pain in transformation. I’m not sure if I’d call this Good News – capital “G” and capital “N.” It might be true – but is it good. Where is the promise of Good News in this journey with Jesus?

Maybe we can find the promise of Good News with Jesus at the temple.

Imagine yourself at the temple. Can you imagine the pain of those listening when Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple? Jesus, a devout Jew, a man called Rabbi, a man some say is God’s Messiah predicts the destruction of the very dwelling place of YHWH. This pronouncement must have been astounding and appalling to those listening. Jesus was going to transform the way people understood how God was with them. But they didn’t know it. God did not need the temple. But they didn’t understand. No one yet understood that Jesus was truly the Messiah – except maybe Peter. But even Peter denied it.

And no one yet understood about the resurrection. In his resurrection, Jesus completely transforms how we understand God to be present to us. We no longer need the temple as a dwelling place for God. God dwells in us, by the Holy Spirit, through the saving act of Jesus Christ. While the temple could be – and was – destroyed, Jesus can never be destroyed. Jesus will never leave us and is always present to us. And in the gospel, Jesus was promising to be present to those who were faithful to him.

Now this is Good News. There is hope and promise that Jesus is with us always. He says, “not a hair of your head will perish.”

I wonder if we really do worry about the hairs on our own heads perishing. Yes, I know that some have more hairs than others. But I'm pretty sure that Jesus is saying is that nothing of us, no part – no matter how small – will be lost. Yes, but, lost to what? Lost to persecution and betrayal? Do we take this gospel literally when it comes to the bad news? What does it mean for us when Jesus says, "These things must take place?" In the gospel lesson, destruction and ruin and betrayal happened. How do we perceive these things to happen to us now? What in our lives today requires our endurance? These questions are about things we might not want to consider. But the text is calling us to pay attention.

What if we consider that this gospel has a very specific and personal message for us? Just as we have had to pay attention to this text that makes us uncomfortable. We need to pay attention to things in our own lives that we would rather not see. We cannot learn from this text unless we pay attention to it – no matter how much we don't like and would rather get right to Advent. In the same way, we cannot be who God needs for us to be unless we attend to our own lives.

What do our own lives look like? Where is there ruin in our own life? Whether we like it or not, there is something in each of our lives that is a plague to our souls. We each in our own way stand in the ruin of our lives.

But the Good News that Jesus is always with us. When find ourselves standing in the rubble of our lives, we are not alone. Jesus is with us and Jesus will transform us. We do not have to travel halfway around the world to find ruin. Nope. This life right here holds enough. But as anyone in recovery knows, we must face our brokenness before it can begin to heal. Until we can look at the difficult text and until we can look at the ruin of our lives, we cannot see where Jesus is.

Jesus will transform us, but we have to know that we need transformation. God is never done with us. No matter where we are on our faith journey, God can transform us into something new. No matter how broken we believe our lives to be, Jesus promises that we will not perish. Jesus will be with us. The transforming presence of Christ means that when we face the ruin of our lives through addiction, or a failed relationship, or in the realization of our own sin, Jesus will redeem us, heal us, and make us whole.

We need to remember this promise and this hope of transformation. Jesus needs us to be healed and whole. We cannot go out into the world as witnesses to Christ unless we first allow

Christ to transform our own lives. We will not have the strength and endurance to do the work that God would have us do unless we are healed and whole. And it is only in looking at and admitting our own brokenness can that we can begin this transformation.

When we began this dialogue, the Gospel lesson sounded discomfiting and absent of hope and Good News. We wondered why it included in today's reading. We wondered where the text was leading us.

This Gospel lesson in Luke encourages us to remember the entirety of our story – not just the pretty parts, or the loving parts, or the hopeful parts. The entirety of all our stories includes those things which are difficult and painful and that leave us broken and wounded. The text leads us to remember that ruin comes before transformation. The lectionary and the cycle of the church year serve to remind us that whenever there is death, Jesus promises resurrection. And whenever there is ruin, Jesus promises transformation.

The Good News is that Jesus cannot be destroyed. He is always with us.

The Good News is that when we are attentive to the ruin in our own life, Jesus can heal and transform us.

And the Good New is that when we are transformed by Jesus, we can be witnesses to Him and transform the world.