



## The Miracle of Impermanence – Touchpoint for November 9, 2022

**Luke 21:5-19 (NRSVUE)** <sup>5</sup> When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, <sup>6</sup> “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.”

<sup>7</sup> They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> “When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; <sup>11</sup> there will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues, and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

<sup>12</sup> “But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. <sup>13</sup> This will give you an opportunity to testify. <sup>14</sup> So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance, <sup>15</sup> for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. <sup>16</sup> You will be betrayed even by parents and siblings, by relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup> You will be hated by all because of my name. <sup>18</sup> But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup> By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

### **Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.**

*“When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ‘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.’”*

The people around Jesus are caught up in the beauty of their surroundings. What a beautiful temple! What a Crystal Cathedral! So much beauty dedicated to God. Why, it was almost out of this world! Which is where we constantly want God to take us.

The temple – built recently by King Herod – was the second great temple of Israel, the first being Solomon’s temple that was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. This second temple was a monument to Herod as well as Yahweh, and this temple’s glory made Israel feel great again.

And what is life if not trying to get back to the glory days, and thinking one is great again!

But Jesus has a different view of what makes one great again ... and again ... and again. And it stands in sharp contrast to the world’s, the culture’s, the country’s view of greatness.

You see, it isn’t just the temple that is going to be torn down. It is one’s image of God as well. Because the Temple represented God’s presence in the world.

The status quo that enabled the temple to be built and maintained will not last forever. And neither will our status quo image of God. The Mystery will reveal an even greater mystery about Its true self. And it won’t be magnificent and beautiful... but tortured and ugly, bloody and beaten, hanging from a cross as a common criminal.

This is where the greatness of God, the Mystery, lies. Not in the display of power and might. Not in the display of dominance and control.

But in servanthood to others. In taking on the sins of the world – the brokenness of the world. Entering into the pain of those left out, thrown to the side of the road, and cast into the trash heap of history.

And if we are going to make Christianity great again, then this is the way to greatness. The suffering servant. The one who does not lord it over others like the Gentiles but becomes a servant first.

And let me be real clear here... when I use the term 'Christianity,' I am talking about the religious and belief system we have built up around this person Jesus. Not Jesus himself. We can neither add nor subtract from his greatness nor his definition of it.

For Jesus, his greatness and glory are at the point where he enters into the pain of human existence. Becoming one with it and us, even to and through the point of death. The greatness of the Christ does not lie outside of human existence, but within it. And specifically in its pain and suffering. This is what the Christ connects to, members himself to.

If we only see this passage as an ancient story of the Temple in Jerusalem, I think we miss the point. If we only see this passage as a predictor of the future, then I think we miss out on its impact. This passage is about our here and now.

What are the temples of our lives? What structures have we built in our lives that we sit back and admire? And not just the physical and material ones. What temples of spirit and self-identity do we worship and glorify in ourselves, as well as God?

And how much energy do we spend in trying to maintain them? Support them? Feed them? And what happens when they fall apart? What do we think when we see our world collapsing around us?

Certainly God has abandoned us! Certainly the Mystery is not with us!

Jesus speaks to all of this in this passage.

He speaks to our self-made temples so beautifully adorned for the world to see. This is not what lasts. He speaks to our corporate and national identities. This is not what lasts. He speaks to our spiritual parading and God-inflating beliefs. "See how beautiful and magnificent we've made God out to be!" This is not what lasts.

What lasts is the Mystery's presence in the face of pain and suffering.

But that is not easy. Who wants their temples torn down? Who wants their greatness questioned, or their definition of 'God's greatness'?

And when it happens, we feel like our world is ending ... like it's the end of the world.

And in one respect it is. It is the end of the world ... OUR world. Which was nothing but an illusion to begin with.

But in that end there is a new beginning. In that end is new birth. In that end is where we 'gain our souls,' to use Jesus' words at the end of our passage.

Thích Nhất Hạnh spoke to this when he wrote:

*"Thanks to impermanence, everything is possible. Life itself is possible. If a grain of corn is not impermanent, it can never be transformed into a stalk of corn. If the stalk were not impermanent, it*

*could never provide us with the ear of corn we eat... When we see the miracle of impermanence our sadness and suffering will pass."*

We keep wanting to make moments or accomplishments in our lives permanent, and that not only is not possible...

### **It is not life!**

I was at Community of the Wild Goose a few years ago, and during a discussion a woman was talking about her entering into her Recovery/Treatment program. And she made this amazing comment: "I thought going into treatment was DEFEAT. It turned out to be RELIEF!"

Her self-made temples had been torn down. Her beautiful adornments lay shattered. She thought it was defeat. It turned out to be relief.

In THAT END ... she had 'gained her soul.'

This passage doesn't promise greatness in our lives as we commonly understand it. And I don't think it even speaks to 'end times' as we commonly think about it. We can't use this passage as a new road map to predicting the future.

And those who think they can predict what God is going to do, and when the end times are coming, well, they are zero-for-2,000 years in that department. And that's not a very good track record.

You see, the problem is that we keep wanting to make this passage, and passages like this, about the world 'out there.' The world beyond us. But the greatness of the Christ does not lie outside of human existence, but within it. And specifically in its pain and suffering.

This is what the Christ connects himself to ... members himself to.

And if we can be honest, all the things that Jesus talks about have taken place in our lives.

Have you ever been at war with another? Have you ever risen up against another or had another rise up against you?

Have your life's foundations ever been shaken to the core – an existential earthquake?

Have you had moments of 'famine' in your life or been hit with a 'plague' of misfortune?

Has your personal little kingdom come under attack?

Have you ever experienced 'end times'?

Has impermanence hit you over the head like a 2x4?

You see, it is in those moments that we want to make everything great again. We long for permanence.

But Jesus comes with a different word:

*"I am with you. You have my permanence. You have my enduring presence and it is in this enduring presence that you will 'gain your soul.'*

*"In those moments, and in that time, you will once again discover that your true self is not all those things YOU created, but your true self is the one "I" created," says the Mystery. "Connected to me ... membered to me."*

Kind of like this meal, huh?

In the night in which Judas' kingdom came crashing down. Because he, more than any of them, wanted to make Israel great again.

And in the night Peter was 'plagued' with fear, and Thomas was 'plagued' with doubts.

And in the night the rest of them experienced a 'famine' of courage.

In that night, Jesus took bread and wine and gave them a foretaste of his 'greatness.'

*"My body and blood ... Myself ... for you and in you. This is where your greatness lies ... in being re-connected and re-membered to me ... Do this to re-member me."*

And in looking back at that moment, they would realize that 'their defeat turned into their relief,' and they gained, through Christ's permanent and enduring presence...

Their soul ... their true self.

**Amen.**

## **Spirit in the Desert**

### **Opening Songs**

#### **Be Still**

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

#### **You Lord Are In This Place**

(Keith Duke)

You Lord are in 1)...this place.  
2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.  
Your presence fills it.  
Your presence is peace.

### **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

### **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

#### **Lead Me, Lord**

(Discovery Singers)

Lead me, Lord. Lead me in thy righteousness. Make thy way plain before my face. For it is thou, Lord, thou Lord only, that makest me to dwell in safety.

### **The Meal**

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

(Taize Reflections)

### **Benediction**

#### **The Lord Bless You and Keep You**

(National Lutheran Choir, Peter C. Lukin)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you. And give you peace.  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you. And be gracious unto you. The Lord be gracious unto you. Amen.