

**Sermon Year C Proper 28**  
**Isaiah 65.17-25 or Malachi 4.1-2a; Canticle 9 or Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3.6-13;**  
**Luke 21.5-19**  
**End times**

As our “Ordinary” time, or those Sundays after Pentecost, comes to a close we face, once again, scripture relating to the *apocalyptic*, or end-times.

Christians are called ... rather than to see “gloom and doom” ... to look through the lens of opportunity and hopefulness ... to what *could be* if we chose to intentionally live into the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

We heard from Canon Alan to consider the “whoas” of the beatitudes as opportunities to watch our steps as we journey forward.

This week Malachi offers us another warning .. or is it an invitation to mend our ways?

Our psalm responds by inviting us to “sing a new song”

And, in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, he is dealing with a group of folks who understood the return of Jesus to be within a very short period of time. With that in mind, they interpreted this time to be a time of waiting on him rather than continuing to be productive in his

name. Paul reminds them that they must not stop to rest but to continue on and to continue to do what is right.

And in our gospel this morning Luke, Jesus speaks of end-times. He speaks of the temple.

(The temple to which they thought Jesus was referring, in this instance, was actually the third and final temple. King Solomon built the first temple that was destroyed after the second Babylonian attack in 587 B.C. When the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylonia, they built the second temple that Herod tore down in 20 B.C. to make room for the temple that he envisioned and was completed in 63 A.D. It was the most magnificent temple by all standards.)

Now we must keep in mind that Luke wrote this Gospel at least a decade or more after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. To gain an appreciation of the impact that those events must have had on the early church, we need only remember 9/11. Imagine if that had been the total of New York City.

This was the temple whose “wailing wall” that we see today in Jerusalem. “The days will come when not one stone will be left upon

another, all will be thrown down.” How utterly unbelievable it must have been for those listening, that such a mighty fortress could be destroyed! The hearers then wanted signs ... ways of knowing so they could prepare themselves.

And as we read the next phrases we hear about war and insurrections; famines, plagues, earthquakes. Sound familiar? Perhaps it is all too familiar. Each year they tend to get worse. Every age has experienced the same and perhaps that is why some people (whom we would call “false prophets”) believe they know the exact day and the exact hour.

Jesus also prepares those who question him with the bad news that he will not be the only one who suffers, but they, as his disciples ... that his followers will suffer as well. Yet, Jesus ends up telling them “not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

In other words, he urges us to continue to “keep on keeping on” in faith and confidence in God almighty as is God’s continued love and faith in us.

Our gospel does not give us any specific means of determining or predicting the world's end, but it does give us the spiritual resources to cope with adversity and hardship. Just imagine what it would be like if we could not or did not have God to rely upon when things get bad, especially during the past few years!

We are called, according to our baptismal promises, to create community, to oppose injustice, to work for peace and make a place for the “other” ... those persons who are excluded in what is known as the “real” world. Our challenge is to live the Kingdom of God in the “real” world.

When we are able to reframe our references we learn that a temple is merely a façade. We learn that even the finest of religious buildings have no value unless people faithfully do God's will. Many city churches are now nearly empty buildings whose congregations failed in their Great Commission ... to reach out with the Gospel ... to love their neighbors and to serve the community.

We have learned this morning that our most magnificent works ... buildings ... even those that seem the most enduring ... are momentary in the grand scheme of things.

I wish to share with you this morning “the tale of two buildings”.

First, a few years back our Cathedral Church of Christ the King in Kalamazoo was sold to a Pentecostal Church. As was told to me (who was living in Virginia at the time) that the diocese of Western Michigan, facing major financial problems that year, was not even able to make its pledge to the national church. The diocesan council had been charged with coming up with a vision for parceling the land and hopefully some plan for selling both the parcels and the cathedral building itself. It sat on a huge tract of land that was originally planned some 50 years ago to also support a retirement community facility and a school. Yet somehow, during the ensuing years, these dreams got sidetracked... and, eventually were lost. Yet today, without the structure of a “cathedral” the Diocese thrives in a new way.

The second story comes from Trinity Episcopal Church in Bayonne, New Jersey. This is a story of endings and of hope and of

resurrection. The original church seated about 400 persons and was built by the Rockefellers, just minutes outside of New York City. This was a church to beat all churches and even had such things as a bowling alley and a target practice area in its basement! (This, incidentally, was used by the police force.). It was a first class structure with all the “bells and whistles” and then some.

But, suddenly, and without warning, the facility burned to the ground. A few things were salvaged, including ... the altar and the pulpit among them.

The church was rebuilt. It is now a much smaller structure, “able to seat about 100” and has about 80 members, of whom approximately 60 are faithful attendees. It has a very strong music program with children’s choirs, bell choirs, adult choirs, and a very strong outreach program to the disabled. Now, are you ready for this? It has a paid staff of 38 persons! How, I wondered, could this happen? Fr. Pisani, their retired rector, told me that

1. it is a tithing community. i.e., 10% of its members’ gross

income is given to the church; this small band of members are

very much aware of and are committed the Great Commission.

They *choose* to live into that through not only their personal participation but through their checkbooks as well.

2. its missional outreach programs are supported through grant writing, seeking ongoing support for all of the programs they have going ... the work with the disabled in feeding, training, providing jobs, educating ... the after school music program they have that brings young people to church ... not only for after school activity but for the church music program on Sundays.

And on and on he went ... sharing his enthusiasm for this thirty year vision and mission.

So, for the congregation of Trinity Episcopal Church in Bayonne New Jersey, for the past thirty years, they who wished to find a more vibrant religious experience, looked, not for signs of the future, but for signals that it was time to live by Jesus' call for obedience in the here and now. They looked for where God was already at work in the neighborhood and joined God there.#

Here we are ... living once again with all those signs ... as have good people all through history. Will we recognize that the time is now, the signals are there for us to move ahead ... look outward rather than inward for our role in the Kingdom of Heaven as it applies right here and right now? Are we ready to think in new terms as we wrestle and pray to find our place in this area defined as southwestern Michigan?

I believe that we will, with God's help.

In the Eucharist this morning, we will be met by Jesus ... taken into God's kingdom. Jesus comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead, each time we gather in the Eucharistic feast. It is in our awareness and acceptance that we are invited to seek a new vision, a new way of being in relationship that gives authentic Christian living its character, compelling us into worship and into missional ministry to others in the name of Christ as we may have never envisioned it before.

Are we ready? I think we are.

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Amen.