

Do Not Be Deceived
November 19, 2010
Luke 21:9 – 15

Listen now for the reading of God's Word for the people of God.

While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings, Jesus said, "All that you see here-- the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down."

Then they asked him, "Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?"

He answered, "See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Do not follow them! When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end."

Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky.

"Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, 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 on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

“Twins, a sister and brother were talking to each other in the womb. The little sister said to the little brother, ‘I believe that there is life after birth!’ Her brother protested: ‘No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling on to the cord that feeds us.’ But the little girl insisted: ‘There must be something more than this dark place, there must be something else where there is light and freedom to move.’ Still she could not convince her twin brother.

Then after some silence, she said hesitantly: ‘I have something else to say, and I am afraid you won’t believe that either; I think there is a mother!’ Her little brother now became furious: ‘A mother, really, a mother, what are you talking about? I have never seen a mother and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have so let’s be content.’ The little sister finally said: ‘Don’t you feel this pressure sometimes? It’s really unpleasant and sometimes even painful.’ ‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘what’s special about that?’ ‘Well,’ the sister said, ‘I think this pressure is there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face to face! Don’t you think that’s exciting?!’

[\(Friar Tommy Lane\)](#)

So I challenge each of us today to contemplate the reality that there is, for each of us, something more than what we currently experience; that there is more to our existence than just our daily chore of getting up, going to work and returning home when our day is done just to anticipate that tomorrow will bring for us the beginning of what we have come to know as our daily lives. And we must listen, see and experience all that is around us. Not just the sights and sounds that we have become accustomed to, but the sights and sounds and our experience of those things to which we know are there but we fail to realize because we are too preoccupied with life to notice them. Jesus spoke of these things in our reading today; false prophets claiming to know

the will of God when in fact there is no basis in their daily lives to support their claim; no love to endorse their claim to know God, and then there are wars and insurrections – more of which are about the daily experiences of prejudice and injustice that surround each of us than just the media’s portrayal of the physical wars we see and hear about on TV. Our people are at war today, with each other; in their neighborhoods, on the school bus, on the playground, in their classrooms, their places of business, and their homes and even in their places of worship. People are bullied, ridiculed and called names because they are different, because they do not fit the status quo and especially because they are considered to be less than what modern culture expects them to be, all without any acknowledgement of who our God has called them to be; beloved children of God.

I can’t help but hear within the lines of our reading today that Jesus is speaking more to us than just words that warn us of the persecutions of those who will one day claim him as their personal Lord and Savior. His words warn us that in the days that precede his final arrival here on Earth there will be many who claim to know him and yet find themselves doing more harm than good to those around them. God sent his Son to die for us all, not just a few and so many who carry the name of Christ have forgotten the words of John 3:16, 17 when Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that God gave God’s one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Why, oh why, do so many who claim to know Christ and to carry God’s love within their hearts forget that salvation has come through the blood of Christ for ALL who believe and that condemnation has never and will never be a part of God’s plan.

Then there are the words of Christ here in today's reading that I believe strike me with the most feeling and awareness. Jesus says to his disciples, "Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors . . ." Why? ". . . Because of my name," that is the name of Jesus. In taking the Bible at face value, many have justifiably claimed that such institutions as slavery are o.k. and even endorsed by Jesus. In Matthew 10:24 Jesus is quoted as saying, "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master," and again in Matthew 24:45,46 the words of Jesus state, "Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives." However, this isn't at all what Jesus was trying to convey; common sense should tell any of us that. But many have been persecuted and even imprisoned in our world's history using these scriptures as a basis of justification and all in the name of Jesus.

"You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name." Again we are told here it is because of the name of Jesus. Do these words speak anything to us today? Should they? I think so. There are people all over the world today who fear becoming Christian because of the abandonment that they will endure by their families. Mrs. Susan Escoe, a paraprofessional in Stephen County told me the story of a young lady she led to Christ while she was a missionary in China. She encouraged the young lady to tell three people, just three, during the week after her accepting Jesus as her Savior about what God had done for her. The girl was terrified. She explained to Mrs. Escoe that if she told anyone about her accepting Christ into her life, if she told anyone that she had become a Christian, she would be condemned by her family. The most

many of us ever have to worry about when it comes to our faith is how much money we are going to put into the offering plate or whether or not Chris is going to pick out the same old song again for our gathering hymn. This young lady, however, had everything to lose in acknowledging her faith; possibly even her life; maybe not in the sense of a physical death but certainly a loss of everything she had come to know and endear.

But this sort of persecution isn't just happening miles away on foreign soil. It is happening right here in our country today. How many of our young people today have been abandoned by their families because of their sexuality, because of their God given call to be the one that God has created them to be; beloved children of God who just happen to find earthly comfort and love in the arms of someone of the same gender. And why have they been cast aside and persecuted? They have been marginalized, forgotten, bullied, victimized and mistreated all in the name of God and in turn the name of God's Son, our Savior – Jesus Christ. It just isn't right, it isn't fair and if you believe that there are not signs all around us of the end of all that God had intended in the sending of God's Son to save this lost and dying world, then look again. It's all around us; in our schools, our places of business, our homes, our government and yes, even in our churches today.

Let us not be discouraged by all of this today, but rather let us be encouraged by the words that Jesus is speaking to his disciples because our reading today does not end here. Jesus tells us that while all of this may be true, "Not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives." So let us leave here today encouraged that God has for each of us a plan and that in all we encounter in our daily lives, the pleasant and not so pleasant, God has a plan.

In the story I told at the beginning of our sermon today the twin brother did not believe there was anything beyond what he could see and hear and touch while his twin sister believed there was a life beyond what she could see and hear and touch. That story should speak to each of us about the very reality of life. We are like the twin sister, we say “we are only passing through,” that is, “this life is preparing us for something bigger and better than we can ever imagine;” we are being prepared for eternal life. We live in strange times with lots of tragedies and appalling accidents and many people dying young; some by their own hands. During times like this we need more than ever to remember that our lives here on earth are a pilgrimage to God. We are sons and daughters of our heavenly Creator. Like the girl in the womb who could not see her mother, we, too, must believe that eternal life follows this life and that there is more to this life than we can see and hear and touch.

Let us look beyond the pain of life and see the presence of God in our world, and the offer of life that God wants to make to each of us. Let us look beyond the illusion of happiness that this life offers to the real happiness that God offers us. Let us look beyond this world and to our eternal life with God. Let us hold to the words of Timothy who wrote, “with me bear the hardships for the sake of the Good News, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy” (2 Timothy 1:8 – 9) . . . not to be victims, not to be marginalized, and certainly not to be forgotten, but rather “to be holy.”

The girl in the womb knew there was more to what she could see and hear and touch. Let us look beyond, and see that God is really with us. God has not left us on our own, God is with us. To the One who has created each of us to be a beloved child of God, let us offer thanks and praise today for the blessings we have been given and for the eternal presence of God’s company as together we travel through this life to the next. Amen.