

Daily Devotions

November 6-12, 2022

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Each Day is based on this text.

Luke 21:5-19

⁵When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, [Jesus] said, ⁶“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.”

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

⁹“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.” ¹⁰Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

¹²“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. ¹³This will give you an opportunity to testify. ¹⁴So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; ¹⁵for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all because of my name. ¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Sunday, November 6, 2022

This week we are going to delve deep into this text from Luke, looking at it from different contexts. The author of Luke is widely presumed to be the same author as that of Acts. In the book of Acts we follow the story lines of those who are trying their best to share the gospel after Jesus has ascended into heaven. This involves the threat of danger and persecution (there was a reason Paul was imprisoned so often!). Some of what is predicted within this text in Luke happens in Acts. Luke and Acts are set in the time when Jesus was teaching and the church was beginning to form, but the author of Luke wrote this gospel around 85 CE. If we look at this text from a historical context, it is a turbulent time. In 70 CE the Jewish people experience the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Before the destruction of the temple, there were several rebel factions that had taken over the city and a 5-month siege by the Roman army. Murder, famine, and even cannibalism plagued the city. Now, all of this should start to sound mighty familiar because it mirrors some of the predictions in Luke's gospel. The author of Luke, while he is writing the gospel, is dealing with a chaotic and violent world where nothing seems sure

and even the vestiges of a beautiful and expansive temple, the source of worship life for the Jewish people, has been destroyed.

While we are not living in 85 CE, we are facing difficult times in our own world – war, natural disasters, and political turmoil. One way to connect with a text is to name what is similar and what is different from our own time. I invite you to make a list of where you identify with what is happening within this text and where you see some differences in your lived experience. It may seem as though Jesus is speaking of a future time, but is there a possibility that he is also referencing what we experience in the here and now?

Let's pray: *Gracious God, the gospels help us to see you at work in the world. We thank you for your Word, even when it is scary or ominous. Help us to see both the good and that which causes suffering in our world. Let us know that no matter what, you are here, and you are active in our time, just as you were 2,000 years ago. Help us to see you at work as we place ourselves in the gospels and try to be better hearers of your Word. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

Monday, November 7, 2022

Yesterday we looked at the context of Luke as an author living in a specific time. It is also important to look at where this text fits into the context of the entire gospel of Luke. Jesus has entered Jerusalem and the next chapter sets off the betrayal and the Passover meal. Things are escalating quickly, and Jesus is doing his best to make sure that his disciples will continue to follow him because in the background is the drum beat of Jesus' march toward the cross and his impending death when he will no longer be physically present amongst the people. In a parallel way, the temple, and its destruction, factors into this. During the time before the rebuilding of the second temple (around 515 BCE), the Jewish people struggled with where God was present and the question of whether God could be present outside of the temple (see Ezra and Nehemiah). Jesus often compares himself to the temple. 'Can God present outside of the temple?' and, 'How will we follow God when Jesus is not physically present?' are parallel questions. While it may seem like there is some animosity towards the temple in this text, the temple is used as a symbol and a reminder that buildings come and go and even Jesus' body may be gone, but God's Holy Spirit is ever-present.

How do you connect with God outside of your worship space? Where is a place or time that you have felt most connected to Jesus?

Let's pray: *Gracious God, you have prepared your people for the time when Jesus would no longer be physically amongst them. Help us to remember that you are always with us and give us open hearts and listening ears to be disciples of your will. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

Tuesday, November 8, 2022

One important way to read a text is through its literary style in order to understand the author's intention behind the work. This text from Luke is rooted in a literary style known as apocalyptic literature. I imagine that when you think of the word 'apocalypse' you might first think of end-times. You might imagine "The Hunger Games" or the "Left Behind" series. Culturally, apocalypse has come to represent destruction and the end of the world as we know it. While this text certainly has elements that are rooted in unsettling language, imagery, and end-times, it is also an apocalyptic text that is meant to teach us something new. The book of Revelation is also an apocalyptic text. Revelation in Greek is *apokalypsis*. Apocalypse and revelation go hand in hand. An apocalypse is a revelation, and a revelation is an unveiling of new information or a new experience. Think, 'revelatory' or an 'aha moment!'. One of the purposes of revelation is to prepare the people for what is to come.

Yet, before we can experience something new, I think it is important to know from where we begin.

I invite you to make a list of what you already know or have heard about this text as you read through it. What is your initial interpretation of this story? What images does it make you think of? How does it make you feel?

Let's pray: *Gracious God, we come before you seeking your wisdom through your Word. Give us humble hearts and open ears. Help us to recognize all that we bring before you: our fears, our hopes, our gifts, and our shortcomings. Grant us a small slice of your wisdom so that we may use it to the betterment of your world. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

Wednesday, November 9, 2022

Yesterday you learned (if you didn't already know) what apocalypse as a style of literature is. It is a revelation or an unveiling of knowledge or information. Then, you wrote down all of the stuff that you bring to this text. Now it is time to dive into it. Speaking plainly, this text has been used as a mechanism of fear and especially a means to fear God as this scary, judgmental, bringer of the end times. I think about different sects of Christianity that are always trying to claim that they have read the signs for the end times. One site I recently visited even had a countdown clock! Yikes! With this apocalyptic mindset there are a few dangers. One is that we get this image in our heads of a God dispensing judgment in the form of suffering and persecution along with natural disasters. Now, on the 16th and 23rd of October, you heard two parables about God's justice as a judge. The first was about the widow and the unjust judge. It taught that God is a God of justice unlike the judge in the parable. Plus, God cares for God's people and hears their cries. The second was about the pharisee and the tax collector. It taught that God's judgment is always rooted in extravagant mercy. We believe in a God who is merciful, especially when we don't deserve mercy. We believe in a God who is loving and who cares

passionately about God's people. This is the opposite of a judge who is causing suffering and chaos in the world.

How do you reconcile the unsettling language about end times, the trials, and tribulations with who you know God to be?

Let's pray: *Gracious God, we hear the words of Jesus about persecution, trials, tribulations, wars, famines, earthquakes and plagues and they fill our hearts with fear. We recognize that we are already facing many of these things in a broken world. We recognize that we need your justice and mercy when the world plunges into suffering and chaos. Help us to see you as you truly are and cleanse our hearts of the fear that causes us to see you as unjust or lacking mercy. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

Thursday, November 10, 2022

Yesterday we discussed how focusing so much on the end-times can cause us to view God in a way that is harmful and counter to how Jesus teaches about God. One other danger of solely focusing on end-times theology can result in people who are so focused on their own eternal salvation that they forget the point of being disciples altogether. And, we might also lose sight of a building block of our faith: grace. In the text from Luke, Jesus says, "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." We might think about what leads us astray and what types of people we follow that are teaching ways that are so different from the way of Jesus. With this knowledge, how do we balance the apocalypse/ end-times as a possible future reality with an understanding that we really can't predict when something like that will happen, and that Jesus tells us not to follow those who are keen on predicting and proclaiming that they have insider information.

What causes you to stray from the way of Jesus? How do you balance the knowledge of Jesus returning, trials and tribulations, along with living in the here and now and being a disciple who is called to love your neighbor as Jesus has loved you?

Let's pray: *Gracious God, there are so many things in this world that draw us away from you and your love for us. When false prophets lead us astray, help us to refocus on you and your will for our lives. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

Friday, November 11, 2022

Jesus has prepared his disciples for the worst. They could face persecution and end-times struggles. But, what will they learn? What will be their revelation when they are most in need? Jesus promises that they will have the wisdom when they need it the most. Although this text sounds scary, there is indeed some good news. Jesus promises them that they will not be

abandoned. Will they need endurance when things get rough? Yes, absolutely. Will Jesus always guide them? Most definitely! So, given all this persecution, how do we hold together the idea that there will be suffering in the same breath as Jesus promising that not a hair on their heads will be harmed? It sounds contradictory. A while ago I heard a wonderful quote from Father Richard Rohr while listening to a podcast. He said, “God protects me from nothing and sustains me through everything.” Maybe Jesus is telling those who follow him that death is possible, and suffering is possible, but with me there will always be life. They will be sustained through everything that life throws at them because they know and we know that we don’t live in a world where nothing bad will ever happen to us, but we are people of faith who rely on Jesus when things do get rough.

What are your revelations from this text? Do you identify with the quote from Fr. Richard Rohr? In times of suffering, do you feel that God is near and that God provides endurance?

Let’s pray: *Gracious God, when we suffer, help us to always turn to you. Remind us that you have already provided everything that we need and that you will continue to guide us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

Saturday, November 12, 2022

We are now at the end of the week. To review, we have looked at this text from a historical standpoint recognizing that the author of Luke lived in a turbulent time when there was lots of violence, war, and ultimately the destruction of the temple by the Roman army. Within the context of the book of Luke, this text comes near the end, a time when Jesus is preparing his disciples for continuing the ministry without him. This gospel also has intentions as a literary work. It is written in the style of apocalyptic literature. Its purpose is to reveal knowledge so that the hearer can be prepared for what is coming next. Apocalyptic literature also has the purpose of pushing the hearer into motion. If time is of the essence, then you need to be on your toes. It does not mean that we should get complacent, focus only on our own salvation, or think of God as a mean and unjust judge. It means that we should balance being prepared with being disciples in the here and now.

How do we now, at the end the week, make some sort of meaning from this complicated text? The biggest question on our minds and the one that this passage leaves us with is, how do we, through endurance, gain our souls? I think the best way to understand this is to rephrase it and break it down. We already know, through studying this text, that there may be difficult times. The revelation in this text is preparing us for them and not shying away from naming that it will be tough for us. We will need endurance, but we will not need endurance in the way of snacks or strength training, we will need endurance in the form of faithfulness and trust in God. This passage is proclaiming a tough reality in the hopes that we will turn to God when the going gets tough instead of clinging onto false idols or our own personal strength. It therefore reminds us of the importance of our souls, their connection to God, and the nature of a God who is always there for us.

So, the final question I want to leave you with is, ‘Do we have hope in God, even when the world around us looks bleak?’

Let’s pray: *Gracious God, help us to have the endurance to follow you when the going gets tough. In moments of doubt help us to remember to turn to you. Help us to remember that when we pray, you answer our prayers with wisdom and that when we struggle, you provide peace. You give our souls life abundant and we give thanks in the name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.*
