

“THE CHURCH”
Luke 21:5-19

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Last week we heard in our Gospel reading that Jesus came down from the mountains and the crowds swarmed around him to be healed, and then he looked up and began to teach his disciples. In today’s Gospel reading we get a very similar moment. Luke chapter 21 starts with those very words, “He looked up.” Seated there on the temple mount watching the crowds go by, Jesus looks up and sees what others miss. He looks up and begins to teach, to those who can not see what is right there before them. People in the crowd have been talking about the grandeur of the building, perhaps some of his own disciples while Jesus sat there teaching. We know that some were gawking at the earthly beauty and magnificence of the High Temple in Jerusalem.

This church of Jerusalem was a massive building built first by King Solomon and the riches of his kingdom, then restored again after the Babylonian wars and even in Jesus’ day being restored once again in greatness. For almost a thousand years that temple had stood as the center of the Jewish faith. The temple mount itself was impressive covering 169,000 in square yards, that’s over a half million square feet. The front arches soared skyward, with two large pillars directly in front of the main entrance. The outer porch lead into the inner main room which was at least 105 feet long and 4 to 5 stories high. Some of the stones of the walls have been found that weighed tons and are over six feet in length and height. The inside was rich in beauty with each stone was carefully chiseled stones to fit perfectly together, expensive wood surrounded the walls, and filling the room was golden lampstands, ornate curtains, trumpets, and a large east wall curtain protecting the Holy of Holies. It was truly a wonder to behold and in the midst of this Jesus sees and hears those people gawking at this earthly temple.

He looks up and 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.” All the pilgrims and worshippers see the magnificence that surrounds them. All the temple leaders and the disciples see is the seat of power of the Jewish faith. But what Jesus sees as he looks around is the truth, that this earthly temple will not last, it will be destroyed.

Probably after a few minutes the disciples pick their jaws off the ground and ask him when will this be. And he warns them, do not go astray. Others will come who will say I am he. Warnings of the end being near is raised up. Wars will happen, armies and navies, infantry and tanks, bullets and cruise missiles will be launched against others in aggression and hatred. Nations will fight against other nations. There will be earthquakes, famines, and diseases. There will be signs every where in creation. Christians will be arrested and persecuted. Christians will be tested and given time to testify. Friends, parents, children will betray Christians. You will be hated. Even this great temple with the massive stones will be thrown down.

Of course the people hearing Jesus' words at that time can't see that. Can't even picture it happening. The temple is just too big, the walls six feet thick at spots just is just too massive. The grandeur could never be lost they surely think. They can't picture the truth that Jesus is speaking. That the earthly beauty will come to an end. All that beauty and magnificence of the Faith could ever be ruined. But we know that when Luke was writing these words of Jesus, at least 40 years after Jesus spoke these prophecy, that beautiful temple is a destroyed rubble. Destroyed by the Romans in retribution for a Jewish revolt. The walls were thrown down and all that remains is the wailing wall, the small part of what used to be such a magnificent building.

Jesus' words came to pass, they were truth. He saw what the people could not, he looked up and saw the demise of all the things that surround us and in all that we put value. The one thing that will last that Jesus warns his disciples is the people of God. The true church of God, the true Church is the People. He looks up and tells his followers what they will have to do to keep the faith. He tells them how to be the Church. The church is made of the people. Jesus tells them that the building called the temple and all its glory will be thrown down. But keep the faith because the Children of God will live on.

That's the good news of this parable. That things will be torn down, that buildings and seats of power, riches and grandeur will come to an end, but if we stay faithful, if we stay true to God's word even in the face of opposition and attack, that not one hair on our head will perish.

Again Christ is simply speaking the truth, that the people of his day couldn't even see, that following him will be hard. Holding on to the faith is not always easy. Because terrible times may come but God's church will go on. The walls may be thrown down, the earthquakes may come, plagues, and disease, and many signs, but the people of God are still held in God's care. Nothing can ever separate us, the church, the people from the love of God. Not hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, famines or plagues, or persecution because nothing in creation can tear us down. We are his people. Buildings will come and go. Current trends will pass away. Decorations will fall out of fashion. But the baptized people of God will always be his redeemed people through the victory of Jesus Christ. We are to stay to the faith, trust in the Lord and preserve.

There is a story told of two entrepreneurs back in the early 1940's named Elliott Handler and his partner Harold Matson but everyone called him "Matt". During the beginning of World War II, these two men decided to start their own business using scrap Lucite and Plexiglas and remake it into picture frames. They figured it was perfect, what could go wrong, the materials were just scrap and plentiful, and they could make things that were beautiful from it and make a living at it. The picture frames were such a success that Ruth Handler, Elliott's wife had arranged for their first order before they even had a shop set up yet. When they had enough picture frames made she got Matt and Elliot to put them in the car and she began to drive them downtown to deliver the frames. While driving down the road however, she heard

President Roosevelt make a public announcement that all plastics, even scraps, were forbidden for any use other than for the defense initiative.

Reluctantly Ruth did a u-turn and went back to Elliot and their partner Matt to tell them the bad news. Their plans were ruined. Their materials were taken away. Everything they had hoped in was gone. And most entrepreneurs could have given up, but instead Elliott suggested they make the frames out of wood instead. He figured they could spray it and make it look almost the same as the ones they had promised. So off went Ruth once again with some frames to the downtown business that had signed the contract with them. Arriving at the shop, she explained to the owner why they couldn't fulfill the frames that they had promised and instead offered the wooden ones. The owner, hearing the same presidential decree against using plastic, was thrilled with the other option and even ordered more frames than before.

With this even larger order Matt and Elliott had enough confidence to open a little work shop and begin making these wooden frames. Later on, with some scraps of wood left over from making the frames, Elliott proposed they make dollhouse furniture, small wooden toys that perhaps people might want. So these picture framers started a new venture, calling their new company after themselves. They used Matt and Elliott to come up with the name MATTEL Toy Company.

These two partners with the help of Elliott's wife, were able to overcome the ruin of their fledgling business, they preserved when it seemed like everything was falling apart all around them. And they stayed faithful to what they knew and achieved making their little side scrap job into a major toy company of the 20th century.

How often do we need to hear this same message to stay faithful, to persevere. Jesus sees that the people will need to hear that message. He looks up and tells them that they need to stay faithful, to stand strong, to keep to the one who is Lord and God, and even in times of distress, persecution, destruction, and dismay, the confidence will be there knowing that you are God's people now and always.

Christ tells the disciples and us that we are to hold together to the faith of God. Because terrible times may come but God's church will go on. We are his people. That is the beauty that is tremendous. That is something of magnificence that can not be taken away. Stay strong, stay faithful, rely on the one that is the truth, the one you know, and be filled with the peace of God. We the church are his people, and nothing can change that. Amen.