

Proper 28C: Luke 21.5-19  
16 November 2025  
The Rev. Scott Walters

I love the collect for this Sunday. The prayer that we “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” our holy scriptures. It brings a few lines of Mark Strand to mind.

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.  
Her eyes are sad  
and she walks with her hands in her dress...

Before long there are dogs charging up the basement stairs. “Their eyeballs roll,/ their blond legs burn like brush./ The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.// She does not understand...”

Mark Strand seemed to want the experience of reading poetry to be something a little more unruly, alive, maybe more dangerous than what might be allowed in a realm whose ruler values only hush and order. Our collect for the day suggests we may need more than an orderly and rational approach to the consumption of scripture as well.

The scene we just read, marked, and are now inwardly digesting from Luke begins politely and reverently. You might imagine a group of curious tourists in a Gothic cathedral smiling and pointing at the vaulted arches and the stained glass. Just like those who were “speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God.” How lovely. Actually, I’ve been known to say similar things about this very room, haven’t you?

But Jesus suddenly goes all Mark Strand on us. “As for these things that you see,” he says, “the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down...” Oh my! The anxious temple docent at the door thrusts his hands into his tweed jacket. His training manual said nothing about how to handle a situation like this.

The scene’s not over, though. Jesus now has the tourists’ full attention. Remember, these folks came to gawk at a grand old artifact of religious history. They like sturdy, dependable, ancient things. Stable things. They may have come to the temple that day specifically in search of a little quiet and solace from a noisy and chaotic world. When Jesus says, “I’m sorry, but that’s just not in the cards here, they say, “So how about a prediction of the future, rabbi? Or at least a few warning signs so we’ll know when the

dogs are about to come charging up from the basement and wreak their havoc?" Foreknowledge of the destruction is the next best thing, I guess, to an assurance that things are going to stay put forever.

Unfortunately, Jesus won't give them predictions either. In fact, we learn that, not only is he a lousy tour guide and completely unhelpful as a fortune teller, he was a lousy Boy Scout too. Because rather than telling them how to be prepared, he says, "Don't be." Not only will the temple itself be reduced to rubble, there will be wars and earthquakes and famines and plagues. Nonetheless, Jesus says not to try to figure out today what you're going to say in the face of all that in the future. You're going to have to depend on another kind of wisdom. He will give you the words you need when you need them. So some essential part of yourself will need to say open, it seems, even when everything in you wants to put up orderly defenses against the chaos. Or at least wants to get some inside intel so you can prepare for it as best you can.

The hottest title in the summer of 1988 among the Christian camp counselors I was working with was *88 Reasons Why the Rapture will Happen in 1988* by Edgar Whisenant. If you're interested, there's a used copy available on eBay for \$124, unless someone snatched it up since yesterday.

I didn't read the book. But I remember reading the caveat in the introduction. The author admitted that, in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus did say no one will know the day or the hour of his coming, but he didn't say we can't know the year, the month, and the week. Mr. Whisenant's subsequent predictions of the end of the world in 1989, 1993, and 1994 received even less attention for some reason. It's a strange way of reading scripture, and maybe an even stranger way of seeing the world, but don't you think the author just wanted to know what was coming so he could be better prepared? Don't we all?

Jesus refused to give us an inside scoop on the unfolding details of history. But he did give us another way to move through life. Faith is a way of being in this dangerous and beautiful and chaotic and violent world. And Jesus seems to say, at least at times, life will take more living trust than orderly preparation. I mean, when the snarling dogs are coming up the stairs, the Dewey decimal system will not be what keeps them at bay.

Immediately preceding what we read today in Luke was another famous scene at the temple. It's the story of the old widow placing two small copper coins in the treasury. Jesus said, "This poor widow has put in more than all of [the wealthy]; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."

Other than their setting in the temple, the two scenes don't seem to have much in common. In fact it seems a little odd for Jesus to commend the woman for giving so selflessly to a temple he says will soon come crashing down. But both scenes ask us to consider ultimate things. What would you do with your last two coins? What would

you do if your temple lay in ruin? What would you say if you were brought before the king? Faith isn't what we dabble in. Faith is about what we do with the deepest and most precious parts of ourselves when everything is on the line.

By the time Luke's gospel was written down, the temple in Jerusalem probably had already been destroyed. So Jesus' words would have traveled across several decades, not as a miraculous prediction of the future so much as a validation of people's lives in the present. The widow's gift would have validated the crushing sense of loss as that symbol and center of religious life lay in a heap. It was right that they would have given the best of themselves to their faith, just as that widow did. They were also being given a way forward even after losing the thing she and they had given so much of their lives to.

Sometimes this might be true of us too. Many of us have found that the faith that once seemed so certain, so immovable has somehow crumbled. Maybe it came crashing down in a moment. Maybe it eroded slowly. Maybe our 88 clues to the future proved useless or just wrong. And our faith becomes a quaint relic, like a 37 year old book explaining in great detail an end that did not come to pass. We thought our faith would stay put. We thought it could withstand life's testing. But, at least the older form of faith or set of sure beliefs, no longer works for us.

It may take no more loss than the loss of an older form of faith or certainty for us to find ourselves in the story. And maybe, by grace, we find that Jesus' response was meant for us too. "Make up your minds," he says, "not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and...wisdom...when your world comes tumbling down."

"Your future life of faith isn't certain. It never has been," Jesus seems to be telling us, "but I am coming with you."

Maybe a statement like that one smacks of a faith that fell down for you a long time ago. Hymns about Jesus walking with us and talking with us may sound like words from a certainty you know you'll never have again. But here you are. Saying prayers with all these other people. Hearing and seeing and feeling the witness of a community of believers. Not believers in a settled collection of religious facts. But believers in the notion that somehow, a good and gracious God is still at work in our lives. At work even today, even in this frightening, chaotic world.

We find ourselves here, nurturing our trust, as we set the best of ourselves to the apparently useless task of praising God. As though the source of our lives, in spite of all their uncertainty, is a vibrant, living love. And trust really can and does grow and deepen as we see the people around us giving of the best of themselves not only to family and friends but to the broken down lives of strangers as though we all matter. As though all lives share a single, loving source. And maybe we really do find that in spite of the unimaginable changes it has suffered over time, a deep, essential trust in

the love of God really is still alive in us. It just looks different from the faith that once came tumbling down.

We can't go back and try to reconstruct the temple of another time. We're foolish to start making plans about how to keep faith constant into an uncertain future. We just keep showing up together in the present with the lives we actually have. And maybe find that the risen Christ does keep showing up among us, not in the ways we planned for. But with a new word, a new wisdom for a new day that we were never meant to anticipate.

It's actually in life together as the Church that we begin to see faith is not a way of making the world stay put. Faith is a way of living and moving and having our being in a world that never has. And Jesus's presence among us is not a reward for keeping the old certainties propped up. He is present in the trust that lives and grows between us and the people who have stayed close, or even the ones who have drawn near to us, in the blessed rubble.