

March 17 2024 Sermon – Pastor Kris Garey

That was a long reading...and how did it begin, again? As Jesus came out of the Temple....

Oh, that's right, I remember now. The Disciples, following along with Jesus and had arrived in Jerusalem for the second time in a few days. And Jesus again, he went to the Temple...and again he drew crowds to him, again, for both words and deeds, was viewed suspect by leaders of religion and leaders of Roman military and governors. The Temple was the building that was the center of the faith of his families and the majority of people of all the surrounding territory---for it was there, they understood, that God dwelled. And into that valued and treasured Temple, Jesus brought disrupting debate...

And as he left the Temple, one of his disciples, following him, spoke up to exclaim at the massiveness of the building, and even of the stones that formed it.

Its history is important—over hundreds of years the building had been destroyed by invaders, and rebuilt, then destroyed again. A new rebuilding was nearing completion—and it was impressive, something everyone would be remarking on, including the disciples. Given the history, Jesus' response, 'these great buildings? They will be thrown down...' would have sounded threat, no doubt, to religion, culture, and even to the Roman military protection.

But in the Gospel of Mark moves us quickly, and we follow Jesus and the disciples as they walk down the hill the Temple inhabits, cross a valley, and walk up the higher Mount of Olives...and there sit down. One friend who visited the area years ago told me of seeing Olive orchards there...and so I imagine Jesus, seated in the shade of Olive trees with his disciples, who feeling a safe distance from authorities, ask Jesus, "fill us in...what did you mean, all the massive stones will be thrown down?"

The answer seems even more alarming, for Jesus says "beware that no one leads you astray...you're gonna hear about wars---don't be alarmed; you'll hear about groups against groups, nation against nation; earthquakes, famines---but do not be alarmed for this is the beginning of birth pangs." Don't be alarmed? How would that be possible? And how can these terrible sounding endings give birth to new beginnings?

I don't think that could have felt the least bit comforting. Nor would what Jesus says next: darkened sun, moon with no light, stars dropped from the sky, heavens shaken...

And then...maybe, maybe seeing terror in their eyes, he reminds them of what they are familiar with: "take the fig tree...you guys know what it's like---how it can be like a bunch of dead sticks—and then...the those sticks become branches as twigs get fill out, become more supple and tender as buds then leaves begin to show...

Maybe he was saying "Remember these images, dear followers of mine...for what is coming ahead **will** appear as deadness on dead sticks without hope, but when you see these things taking place, remember in God's creating, there is new life ahead.

Do you suppose that, in the days not too far down the road, as Jesus hung on the cross, any of the disciples thought on Jesus' words? Or did any, as they saw the dead body taken down, cry out, "it is as if the stars have fallen from heaven, as if the light of the sun has ended, it is as if the very plants that bear fruit have withered and died...."

But that day we read of today, with Jesus and the disciples sitting on the Mount of Olives with Jesus, looking out over a valley toward the beauty of the Temple---did they hear his words and let hope ease the fears they held inside? Or were they pondering the history they knew....and the fears of the present that they knew.

Ahhhh

We are in the season of Lent, here in the church, across the world. Here in Knife River Lutheran, we have our beautiful setting---but we don't need to pause long to sink into looking out to a world with trials and tribulations for us or others; and famines and earthquakes, volcanoes, blizzards, floods, political conflict---

So you see, the disciples and we are alike.

Ahhh...Jesus. He knew them. Intimately. Each one alone, all as a group. He'd seem them braggadocios one moment, uncertain the next, then awe-struck, then demanding of him the next. He's seen them get up and follow him, almost instantly---seen them then disagree among themselves and seen them try to convince him to do whatever it was he was doing "their way." And through it all,

Jesus had just kept heading to Jerusalem. Heading to the seat of human power. Plowing ahead in his human determination to go where his instincts led him....and where his inexplicable trust in God, led him, for he was also, alone of all humanity, One with God and Spirit of God.

So that he could walk on, to face whatever it was that lay ahead.

And what may he have thought lay ahead? Maybe Temple falling, torn down again as it had been 500 years. Maybe some parting of waters from waters, or earth from earth, or some eruption of unknown strength.

Hmmmm....whatever all **that** was, or was to be, Jesus paused, and sat with his disciples, there on the Mount of Olives, looking across to the other side of the valley at the Temple where they'd been not long ago. Maybe the shade of trees cooled them and let them ponder nature, and fig trees....**and** how twigs get plumper, as newness approaches. How twigs get more supple, as new growth comes. How leaves come out, as new life extends.

So, Jesus said to the disciples...

When you see the things I talked about taking place know this:

No matter what comes, no matter what passes away....**My Truth will be—my Words will stay.**

So then, dear people of God, if Jesus told that to the disciples, there in the cooling shade of Olive Trees above a beautiful valley, looking out over fields of wheat or herds of sheep or oxen plowing or

thunderclouds brewing or Roman Legions stalking or blind men begging or young maidens and old women hauling containers of water or neighbors squabbling or young children singing and dancing and playing

Jesus is telling us as well...

Yes, fearful things will happen.... for there is nature and there are humans and there is history of distrust and dislike and there are worries deep....and **alongside them**, Jesus was saying, is this: **my words**. Underneath all of that comes, there is this: my word.

Promise of Jesus, alongside all that comes--sad divorces and joyous marriages, funeral dirges and music of love; rains that erode canyons and rains that water crops ...

Alongside all that comes, **my words, Jesus said**, will not pass away.

And what are the words of Jesus---Jesus who, we can remember from the Gospel of John, was the Word of God, the VERY WORD the GOD---and that word defies EXACTNESS...yet is Exact.

And is and was Before Creation began..and that Word, the very Word of God, gave his word, that his Words will not wither, cease, fall, nor fail, but will live, and live anew always.

Jesus, Word of God itself, also gave disciples this:

Lifting bread, he says: My body, given for you. Lifting cup, he says: My blood, shed for you.

My Word, always present, so that you may be sustained in knowing I am near, always.

Ah, today March 17. St. Patrick's Day. Sure, now-a-days we grab this day to dress in bright green, adopt Irish accents, have community parades. But St. Patrick ? Real person who lived 1600 years ago who knew deep troubles---captured as a boy, made slave in Ireland, then escaped...and later after, conversion in Christ to Christ, he returned to rugged Ireland with its tribes and many mists and many spirits of discontent....and there St Patrick faced torments, doubts, dangers, wars, violence and violent storms, and in response, immersed himself in the presence of the Word of God in Jesus, whose Word is One Jesus Himself, and so neither word nor promise pass away...

and so—that Word gives us, too, bread and cup and community of faith, that we too might have touch and sight of the tender, ever-growing Newness God bestowed in Christ.

Let us pray, Lord God, we thank you for Christ, Word always Alive...and we thank you too for the example of St. Patrick, as we borrow his prayer:

Lord Jesus, I arise today, through

God's strength to pilot me, ...God's shield to protect me,

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,

Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,

Christ on my right, Christ on my left.

May I arise today, O Lord, upheld anew, in Your Word. Amen.