

13-Nov-2016 Sermon The Destruction of Jerusalem

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Let's talk a bit about what we are about to witness in the baptism—not what we'll see with our eyes, but what is *really* happening, in the spiritual world. And we'll look at this in relation to today's gospel lesson.

Let's start with the passage: it's a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem is the desolation of our lives. The destruction of Jerusalem is the desolation of our lives.

The scene is simple: Jesus and the disciples are having some male-bonding time, on an art walk near the Temple. The disciples—the *bros*--remark to Jesus about how beautiful the Temple was—adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. And the Temple *was* beautiful. It was built with marble and gold; some of its largest stones were 44 feet long and weighed approximately 400 tons. It could accommodate up to a million people. It was just about the size of Safeco field—not just the baseball field, but the whole complex, from street to street. The walls were as high as a 20 story building. Like many modern buildings, it had spikes on the top to discourage birds from sitting there; but these spikes were made of gold. The rabbis said you could not look at the Temple in broad daylight because you might be blinded.

So the disciples pointed out some the features of the Temple to Jesus, expecting Him no doubt to reply with how impressed He was. Instead, He said, "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" (Lk 21:6). Sober words. And *these* are sober days.

Thirty-seven years later, after a four year revolt on the part of the Jews, Titus the Roman general destroyed the walls of Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and destroyed the entire city. Now Titus didn't *intend* to destroy the Temple; he wanted to convert it to be a Temple for the Roman god Jupiter. And that's frequently how it is with us, isn't it. Often, others don't intend to do us harm. And we don't intend to do harm. But in this world, one thing leads to another, doesn't it. One soldier threw a firebrand into the wall, and soon a small fire turned into a larger one, and soon the mob of soldiers, angry and powerful, poured into the Temple grounds and began their rampage. According to Josephus, a first century historian who witnessed the devastation, there was so little left that travelers would not believe Jerusalem had ever been inhabited. And soon, the Romans forbade the Jews from returning, from rebuilding.

The destruction of Jerusalem is the desolation of our lives. So journey with me back to the summer of 1979, where I might have shown God the Temple of my life. "Look, God at these great walls! I come from a wonderful family based on my parent's marriage—well, it may not be the most intimate of marriages, but it seems to be solid, and I'm on great terms with both of them. I just graduated with an *English* degree from the University of Washington! I have a girlfriend and we even may get married within a year or two! After sixteen years of education, I'm ready to conquer the world!"

And God did *not* say to me at that time—although He *could* have—that my parent’s marriage would end in divorce in a year. That the family home was no more. That my attempts to find a good job would be frustrating, and quickly I would settle for jobs where you didn’t need a college education. That I would marry that girlfriend, but that our marriage would also end in divorce. And that those parents whom I adored would each eventually die, two months apart. The destruction of Jerusalem is the desolation of our lives.

In Romans chapter 6, Paul says that we who are baptized are baptized into the death of Jesus. That all the desolation of our lives—all that divorce and sadness and disappointment and anxiety and death—all are included and contained in the death of Jesus. That the destruction of Jerusalem, the siege of the Romans, the starvation because the leaders of the revolt burned the entire food supplies of the city—all of these are encompassed in the death of Jesus. That all shock, and disbelief, and pain—all incorporated in the death of Jesus. That whenever we suffer for another person, that whenever our heart goes out to someone in need, that whenever we cry out to God, “My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord, how long?” (Ps 5:3), that we share in the suffering of Jesus and are united with Him in His death. The destruction of Jerusalem is the death of Jesus. That’s why in this passage Jesus starts out talking about the destruction of the Temple but soon changes the subject to Himself.

All this is true even for Taylor, who is only three years old. All this is true not because of who she is, or what she understands—or more likely *doesn’t* understand—but because of what Jesus did. Because Jesus Himself is the sacrament of baptism. Because He overcame sin. Because He has brought us to God.

But death for Christ, and therefore for us, is not the last word. Everywhere else in the world death has the last word. Everywhere else in history there is only *human* possibility and *human* hopefulness and the saying that tomorrow will be a better day simply because tomorrow *could be* a better day. That we announce that we are *choosing* to have hope when what we really mean is that we have nothing else left to lose.

They say that the brave person is not she who does not feel afraid, but she who conquers that fear. But no one can conquer death. So whether you conquer fear is of no real matter.

But Death for Christ, and therefore for us, is not the last word. Paul says that if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like His (Rom 6:5). By the water of baptism we share in Christ’s resurrection. We live with Him. We are born again and we continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.

So let’s talk a little about that risen life. Because, frankly, our risen life may look a lot like the kind of life when we’re buried with Christ. When the preacher says that we’re living the risen life with Christ, it may really feel like we’re being buried alive. That we’re still in the tomb and that someone forgot to roll the stone away. That the destruction of Jerusalem is the desolation of our lives.

We frequently hear another verse from Romans, this time from Romans 8, that everything works together for good for those who love the Lord and who are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). So let’s interact with that verse and not just employ it as a platitude. Of this verse I think three things. The first is that I think it tells the truth—that everything *does* work together for good. It will probably take a lot longer than you expect it to, but eventually you see that good has come.

But, second, that I'm not smart enough to know *how* it works together for good. It's not so much that it's a mystery; it's more like it's like the theory of relativity. Other people get it, but I don't. As a result, I'm working on a list of questions for God when I get to heaven. At the top of the list is, why did Pete Carroll call a pass on the last play of the 2015 Super Bowl? And why did you let him do it?

And third thing I've learned about this verse—that everything works together for good for those who love the Lord—is that yeah, everything works together, just like my kids' bicycles would work after they needed repair and "I put them back together," but somehow, they didn't work in quite the same way.

With the resurrection, the new life is not like the old life. *God does new things*. In Isaiah, God says that He is doing a new thing, and can we see it? That's the question from God in today's baptism—can you see the new thing He is doing? If you can't, hold on—He'll do a new thing here in a few minutes. He will change us through this baptism. And He expects us to use our faith and our eyes and our brains to see *how* He is changing us.

God has done new things in my life. That English degree turned out to be not that useful for jobs that required me to wear a hairnet and a paper hat--when I asked people if they wanted French fries with their order--but later on, the ability to find meaning in texts and to write halfway decently turned out to be a valuable skill. That my marriage—my first marriage—*was* acrimonious but my current marriage is a joy. That my parents *did* get a divorce and that they *have* passed away but the fact is, I survived and I think about them every day and through those memories they still make me grow and they still reassure me that I am loved and in short, as long as I am alive or my brother is alive or my sisters are alive, my parents are still parenting us.

So, Jerusalem. As I said, the Romans forbade any Jew from returning to Jerusalem upon penalty of death. And it wasn't until the 7th century that the Jews came back to Jerusalem to help rebuild the city. And can you think of who it was who invited them back? In history we see that God does new things in new ways. It was the Muslims who invited the Jews back. And the Muslims also assured the Christians that the Christian holy places in Jerusalem would be protected under Muslim rule. That is resurrection power. That is resurrection life. That the destruction of Jerusalem *is* the desolation of our lives, but that God always rebuilds.

Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple about 37 years before it took place. In 37 years from now, Taylor will be 40 years old. We might make some reasonable predictions about her life when she is 40. She might be married. She might be a mother. She might be a member of the altar guild at her local Episcopal church. She might be a priest or a deacon or even a bishop. Or she might be a regular person with a regular job or be a regular stay-at-home Mom. Nothing wrong with any of those.

But for most of the things in her life, we don't know. We can't imagine what the world will be like in 37 years. We know for certain that Donald Trump will *not* be president—if he's still alive, he'll be 107 years old! We wish for Taylor the same kind of beauty and gaiety that she has today, with the same abundance of love and affection she will feel and the great food that she no doubt will enjoy today. But we all know that there will be heartbreaks in her life. That there may be days or even weeks or longer when she may feel like she's in the tomb and that someone forgot to unroll the stone. For this reason she needs our prayers and for reasons like this we need her to pray for us, just as soon as she is able.

But Taylor Faith Osborne can always say this: that on the 13th of November, 2016, at Christ Church in Anacortes, Washington, she was baptized into the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That she was united with the Son of God into the two most important events in history—and really, the *only* two important events in history. And that no matter how many times her Jerusalem is destroyed, God will always rebuild it. And because of that, in the kingdom of God, this was a very great day. And all God’s people said Amen.