

## Twenty-Six Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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November 18, 2018

They were in awe of the big city. After all, the disciples were from Galilee and had journeyed over 70 miles to Jerusalem. The city had palaces, bridges, monuments, and a large amphitheater. But, nothing compared to the golden temple built atop a gigantic white stone platform. There, they stood in the holiest of places – the literal home of God. A disciple said, “Jesus, look at this place! It’s amazing! It’s massive!” Then, Jesus ruined the moment. Jesus reminded them of the temple’s impermanence, and he spoke about the many edifices that we build up and ways that we shroud reality with a thinly veiled façade.

You see, we do this all the time. We think that the length of our resume or number of digits in our bank account indicates success. We believe that a growing church and rising stock prices are inherently supreme. Our tendency is to place value in massive institutions, gigantic armies, and large budgets, so much so that we, like that disciple, gaze at those stones in awe trying to convince God that they are indeed great.

But, yet again, God does not give us what we expect. For, Jesus has a different view; perhaps, a more confusing view. Trying to understand, the disciples asked him about it. Jesus not only reminded them that all things come to an end, but he’s also reminded them that altering the comfortable is difficult.

The changes that Jesus is talking about are not for the fun of it. Rather, these adjustments move us towards God’s vision for the world. If you’re unclear about what that looks like, recall what we’ve explored all year in this gospel. It’s the change in our thinking that moves us from a

scarcity mentality, where two fish and five loaves could never feed five thousand, toward a mentality where all are fed in abundance (Mark 6). It's an adjustment in our beliefs that acknowledges that the technicalities of the law are subservient to the spirit of the law which calls us to love all people (Mark 12). It's a reorganization where children are our greatest teachers (Mark 9 & 10), where the rich find it hard to experience eternal life (Mark 10), and where our intentions and impacts mean far more than an obligatory action (Mark 11 & 12).

When we're forced to look at God's vision side-by-side with the status quo of our world, we will feel confused, we will doubt if what we read is truly God's vision, and sometimes we will package up a more comfortable message and sell it as God's message. But in the end, Mark's gospel reminds us that following Jesus looks a lot like dying. Following Jesus means rejecting violence and pride. Following Jesus means emulating acts of service and love. You see, to follow Jesus is uncomfortable.

Over the past few weeks, our congregation has begun some important conversations after some individuals attended a conference looking at systems of racial oppression. Now, if I were to take a poll, I imagine that no one would confess to being a racist. However, we operate within and support systems that were built on racial inequality. We've grown up in a culture where white is right. That is, where the white man's way of talking is considered the standard. Where white man's food is considered normal. Where the white man's laws have determined who's in and who's on the outside looking in. We saw it within the church when the pope decreed that anyone who was not a Christian could be made a Christian's slave. And that was not a one-time accident by a single pope

in 1452, for that decree was expanded and extended in 1456, 1481, 1493, and 1514 to systematically enslave and kill Arabs, Africans, and the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas.<sup>1</sup> Again, with the Naturalization Act of 1790, we saw that to become a U.S. citizen you had to be white.<sup>2</sup> More recently, we've seen how segregation continues in our city after being built on the racially-restrictive covenants of the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's but still continue in less overt ways.<sup>3</sup>

You see, we are living in countless systems that are dripping in the blood of people of color. But, when us white people are made aware of this, we get angry because of our discomfort. We say, “now is not the time,” or “that’s not me,” or “times have changed.” Changing a system that provides us comfort and stability brings fear and uncertainty. I wonder if we are afraid of becoming the one who is oppressed. But, racism isn’t the only thing that causes us fear. Gender-neutral bathrooms unsettle us. We have discomfort with same-gender couples, the mentally ill, and the stranger. And, we feel sick just thinking about giving up our gas-guzzling car.

Friends, these are the beginnings of the birth pains. And, it’s far from the end of the world, instead it’s the end of our unquestioned comfort. But, it’s not surprising that Jesus describes it as wars and earthquakes and famines. For, it is our human nature to resist change. It’s human nature to want to do all we can to keep the status quo. Because when the world is turned upside-down and goes all topsy-turvy, not one of us will feel comfortable. But, friends, these stones will fall down, and not one stone will be left upon another.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dum\\_Diversas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dum_Diversas)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalization\\_Act\\_of\\_1790](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalization_Act_of_1790)

<sup>3</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20070927020322/http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/scripts/jimcrow/lawsoutside.cgi?state=Illinois>

So, what now? Well, we remember that it's just God's beginning. It may feel like the world is coming to an end, but it's the beginning of something new happening among us. It's the beginning where we take seriously the destruction we're causing to God's creation that we were directed by God to protect (Genesis 1:28).<sup>4</sup> It's the beginning of people saying that discrimination and exclusion on any level is fundamentally opposed to God's call for us to love our neighbor as ourselves.<sup>5</sup> It's the beginning of a journey started at the font – a journey that we saw begin in Evelyn's baptism where we acknowledge the systems of oppression that undermine God's purposes and a journey that calls towards God's justice and peace.<sup>6</sup>

Friends, it may feel like an ending but our God reminds us it's the beginning of something new. It's the beginning of our call to live out our baptism. It's a beginning that recalls God's love as God suffered by the hands of a world that couldn't acknowledge truth. It's the beginning of a story where we, as people of faith, walk together as pilgrims – where we journey into a world to bring a new reality built on God's justice, peace, and love. Indeed, it's only the beginning. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-and-Culture?\\_ga=2.183145966.971551145.1542545558-1713851513.1524423713](https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-and-Culture?_ga=2.183145966.971551145.1542545558-1713851513.1524423713)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2011/12/challenge-promise-baptism/>