

The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza
The Church of the Good Shepherd
Proper 28, Year C – November 16, 2025
Luke 21:5-9

For over half of Luke's gospel thus far, Jesus has "set his face to Jerusalem" he and has been relentless in his journey toward his inevitable fate. When Jesus finally enters Jerusalem, he heads directly to the Temple: the center of Jewish life, the bastion of God's divine favor, the impressive and seemingly indomitable fortress that is the seat of God on earth.

From this point onward, until Passover and the Last Supper, Jesus is preaching and teaching in the Temple. While there, Jesus is challenged and attacked, as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and other leaders of the religious elite, attempt to trick him into incriminating himself so they may get rid of this troublemaker. Jesus tangles with them but always remains a couple of steps ahead. And as this goes on, more and more people come to hear this rebellious rabbi and prophet who speaks truth too dangerous and inflammatory to utter aloud.

One day, some of those who were gathered around Jesus gazed upon the temple and discussed with admiration its great size and beauty – the seeming permanence and indestructible nature of it. Jesus listened to them and then surprises them with his response, "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." Jesus then proceeds to talk about the terrible signs of the end-times – of wars, insurrections, earthquakes, famines, and plagues – and he then foretells the coming persecution of his faithful followers.

I can only imagine their shock at hearing this. For the Israelites, the Temple in Jerusalem lay at the very center of their identity and communal life. It was in the Temple that the very earthly presence of God resided. In Jesus' time, every important religious ritual took place at the Temple in Jerusalem, and it was expected that all Jews make the pilgrimage to it at certain points in their lives. The Temple represented a material, concrete manifestation of God and God's favor upon His chosen people – it was where the faithful went to meet God. For the Temple to be destroyed, it begged serious existential questions: who are we then, without the temple? Since the seat of God resides there, does its destruction mean that God is no longer with us? How do we continue as God's chosen people without it?

While I often have difficulty making much sense of apocalyptic predictions, Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple resonates with me. I think we all know something about what it means when our temples fall – when something that seems so central, so essential and fixed in our lives, collapses to rubble. These temples may be places, institutions, relationships, or core identity markers that once seemed fixed and central to our understanding of who we are and the world around us.

The loss of these temples is frightening and destabilizing. We usually struggle mightily and do all in our power to resist the inevitable decline and collapse. And yet, after all that we feared has occurred, we may be surprised to find the tender shoots of new life taking root amid the rubble. Who among us has not sensed and mourned the loss and destruction of some core aspect of our identity, and yet, after a while, found a new sense of self beginning to form? Who has not lost something so essential, something that seemed crucial to our very life and happiness, to later find that that loss made room for something new and unexpected to take root?

This continual cycle of creation, decay, and collapse is disconcerting for us as we are creatures of habit. We desire and seek out constancy, security, and predictability. The problem, perhaps, is not that we seek these comforts but rather where we turn to find them. Rather than seeking our source of constancy and security in God, we turn to each other and created institutions for this comfort. And, at least for a time, we often find comfort there. But then our fallible

institutions – our political systems, cultural and economic structures, and even our churches – will eventually disappoint and prove themselves to be what they really are: impermeant, imperfect, and subject to inevitable decay and destruction. Seeking our assurance and comfort there seems to only lead to greater anxiety.

We are currently living in an especially anxious age. Uncertainty and unpredictability abound in nearly all facets of our lives. Institutions we have counted on to be stable and secure are cracking. Our political system is transforming and redefining itself. Our ability to predict what tomorrow will bring in order to decide what to do today is failing. The signifiers we have relied upon to make sense of the world about us are changing. *Our temples are falling and we are anxious and fearful.* Engulfed in this toxic cloud of unsettledness and fear, it can be hard to remember that the truth of created existence is that life is uncertain, people are fallible and sinful, and all that is now will – one day – not be.

The Church as well seems to be in a time of destruction and re-creation; of transition away from what it once was and through this confusing chaotic period until it becomes more clear what it will be. In her book, *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle observed that that about every 500 years, the Church writ-large goes through what she called a “Great Rummage Sale.” In these times the Church is rocked by massive transitions through which it reshapes itself by letting go of what doesn’t work, evaluating what should continue, and looking for new ways to be faithful.

In the past couple of decades, there has been much deliberation and discussion about the decline of the church in the west. This undeniable decline in religious affiliation and church attendance has generated much anxiety among the faithful. That the Church is dying is almost not even debated anymore but rather assumed as true. Yet, I agree with Phyllis Tickle – I believe that the church is not dying, but it is most certainly changing. And what the future church will be, I do not know. Our *faithful response* is not to try to stop these changes, rather it is to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit through them and to work with her to remove whatever obstacles might be in the way. Created life is ephemeral and constantly changing: building up; breaking down; transforming from one thing to another.

So, what do we do with our anxiety in the face of radical change and uncertain futures? Where do we anchor our sense of self when our identity markers are crumbling? How do we find God when we realize our temples are falling? Jesus offers a new vision for relationship with God and identity as God’s beloved. This relationship is not contained within beautiful stonework of the temples made by human hands, but within the resurrected Christ’s very own body.

After telling his followers that massive change is on the horizon, Jesus then comforts them, saying: ***Do not be terrified... by your endurance, you will gain your souls.*** Our endurance is sourced from our faith and hope – faith and hope in God’s love and work in Jesus, who is strong and faithful no matter what. So when in fear, if we turn our attention to Jesus and entrust our faith and hope in him, we will find our shalom – our wholeness, peace, and comfort. “I am with you always to the end of the age,” Jesus reassures us in Matthew’s gospel. If Jesus is faithful, we can endure and be at peace no matter what.

In these times of anxiety and fear, amid the chaos and the rubble, I pray that we are given ears to hear Jesus calling to us to turn our attention to him. I pray that we are given the grace to entrust in him our faith and hope, and, in doing so, we may find the shalom and comfort we seek. And I pray that as we observe the crumbling landscape of our human institutions, God sharpens our vision to see the tender shoots of His new creation that are only now beginning to reveal themselves.

Do not fear... by your faith and hope in God in Christ, you will save your souls.

Amen.