

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

*Rev. Andy Rutrough*

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Sermon, November 13, 2022

Luke 21:1-19

I got a phone message a few months ago from a group of people who wanted to do a Bible study at our church, about how the book of Revelation predicts what will happen when Jesus comes soon. I did not return the call because the Bible does not predict the future. Instead, the Bible promises. Can you repeat that with me? The Bible does not predict. Instead, the Bible promises.

In other words, our future is in God's hands. What exactly will happen is not set in stone. God is a living, active God, not a dead Fate that cannot change. God might choose to allow one thing to happen, then, later, choose to help a different thing to happen. We don't know. We trust God.

We trust God's promises, that whatever happens, God's love wins in the end. Whatever happens, God's mercy prevails.

The book of Revelation, as well as the readings from Daniel we heard last week and the Gospel lesson for today, with their strange references to wars and rumors of wars and scary signs in the sun and the heavens, these kinds of passages are called "apocalyptic literature."

"Apocalyptic" is today's fifty-cent word. It means "Unveiling," "Revelation," not "Prediction." Apocalypse unveils the truth that God's promises, God's mercy are deeper than any evil, any chaos.

Apocalyptic literature is written down in times where people think that evil has triumphed in the world, and that the world is sinking into chaos. That's where you

get all the references to giant beasts destroying one third of the land and so on. God's mercy is more powerful than any giant beast, any country, any power.

But we human beings are easily terrified by great shows of power. We are easily intimidated by displays of vast wealth. If our side is winning, the shows of power and wealth lead us easily toward arrogance. If our side is losing, the shows of power and wealth lead us easily to despair. This is how we human beings see things, generally.

God, however, sees things differently than we do. Apocalypse unveils what God sees, reveals what God knows.

In the verses before the gospel lesson for today, Jesus is sitting opposite the treasury box in the temple. Many wealthy people are dropping large sums of money in the treasury box. "Plonk, Plonk" go the gold coins in the treasury box. Then a poor widow comes up to the treasury box, and puts in two copper coins, "plink, plink."

Jesus says that she put in more than all the others, because she put in everything she had, her whole life.

That's the way God sees. God sees two copper coins as more than all the wealth in the world, if those two copper coins are all we have, our selves, our hearts, our love.

Then, immediately after this scene, some people have either not heard Jesus or not understood him, because they are admiring all the wonderful stones and expensive ornaments in the temple. And indeed, it was spectacular. The curtain across the Holy of Holies was woven in far away Babylon. The walls had huge white marble slabs. The doors were gold-plated, so that they shone in the sun from miles away. The temple courtyard could hold four hundred thousand people, and sometimes did. This was the place where God reached down and touched the earth. Everybody knew this.

Everybody also knew who built the temple. King Herod built the temple. You may remember King Herod from the Christmas stories. He lied to the wise men when they came to find the Baby Jesus. And when the wise men caught on to his lies, he stormed into a rage and ordered all the children aged two years old or younger in Bethlehem to be killed, in an effort to destroy the Christ Child. Because the Christ Child was to be the King of the Jews. Herod saw that as a threat to his power. He

and only he was King of the Jews. Herod had even killed members of his own family to keep his grip on power.

Herod the Great, they called him, because he built that temple. In reality, he was Herod the liar, Herod the butcher.

Jesus says, “All these splendid stones, this show of wealth and power: it will all fall down, not one stone on another.”

Only one thing lasts. Only one thing: The mercy of God. If we build with the mercy of God, what we build will last, in some form or another. If we build without it, it will fall to dust, no matter how splendid or imposing it might be.

Here is some good news. God’s mercy builds us. Every day, whether we are rich or poor, whether we feel like we are winning or losing right now, whether we feel strong and stable, or the world is crashing down around us, God’s mercy comes to us and builds us back into images of God, expressions of God’s beauty, windows on God’s life, again and again every day. That’s what it means to be Baptized.

So, whether we are rich or poor or in the middle, winning or losing or somewhere in between, whether the world is good and stable or bad and crumbling, or a little bit of both, we put our coins, our selves, our lives in the treasury box of God’s life. And we trust. We trust the Bible’s promise that God’s mercy will prevail.

Thanks be to God.