

**Weekend of Sunday, November 17, 2019**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 33/Proper 28/Year C**  
**Primary Text: Luke 21:5-19**  
**Sermon Title: “Do Not Be Weary in Doing What is Right”**

**Theme**

*As history moves toward God’s fulfillment there will be frightening signs and events. Before the end, believers will draw strength from their relationship to God and shall be given the words they need to testify and to endure without fear.*

**Text**

<sup>5</sup>When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, [Jesus] said, <sup>6</sup>“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.”

<sup>7</sup>They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” <sup>8</sup>And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them.

<sup>9</sup>“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” <sup>10</sup>Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; <sup>11</sup>there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

<sup>12</sup>“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. <sup>13</sup>This will give you an opportunity to testify. <sup>14</sup>So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; <sup>15</sup>for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. <sup>16</sup>You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup>You will be hated by all because of my name. <sup>18</sup>But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup>By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

## Sermon

About that Gospel Reading, I would like to say simply, "Ish!" What a dreary dreary Gospel Reading. But preaching the gospel is my vocation. Let's make the best of it and see where it lands.

Chronologically, I would like to start with the First Reading from the Old Testament book of Malachi, though it too is dreary.

Malachi was a prophet whose name literally means "my messenger" or "God's messenger" and true to his name and vocation as prophet of the God of Israel, he delivered a message to Israel.

Before we get into his short message, let me remind you that throughout the Old Testament, God didn't punish his people the Israelites, but God did allow them to suffer the consequences of their own apostasy, their own sinfulness. Out of great love for them, God let them to go their own way to their own peril and as a result the Israelites suffered again and again.

Prior to the ministry of God's messenger, Malachi, the Israelites were under the control of the evil Babylonians, whose method of managing occupied nations included exiling, the scattering the conquered people in an effort to destroy their religion, culture, language, and traditions. But God had not forgotten them and sent relief in the form of the Persians, who though were still an occupying army, had a different model of managing the people they conquered.

The Persians allowed and even encouraged the Israelites to return to their homeland and restore their cities and allowed them to worship as they saw fit. However, when the Israelites returned, there was really nothing to return to. Their cities were destroyed, their Temple was razed, and since the Temple was supposed have been the place where God was present with them, the Israelites were without hope; it seemed their God had abandoned them, and they would never have justice.

It is into this scenario that Malachi prophesied. Though they were defeated and downtrodden, God's justice will destroy all evildoers, and the faithful will be raised up by one whom God called the "sun of righteousness." Malachi said that this "sun

of righteousness" will have "healing in its wings." So, Malachi's message was, "Hold on, help is on its way."

However, Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, and likely the last prophet of the Old Testament era, and was probably written about 433 BCE. That means it would be another four centuries (give or take a few) until this promised help will arrive. Christians understand this to be Jesus Christ.

Chronologically, the Gospel Reading comes next.

The Gospel Reading comes from Luke 21 which places the reading on Tuesday of Holy Week. The population of Jerusalem was growing day by day as Jewish pilgrims came from all over the known world to celebrate the Festival of the Passover.

Do not be mistaken, the Temple in Jerusalem was one of the biggest and most spectacular buildings in the world at that time. King Herod the Great, who ruled over Judea since about 47 BCE, had completely rebuilt and beautified the Temple during his reign and that is the Temple that Jesus and his disciples were looking at in the Gospel Reading.

As an aside, some of you know that I did my year of pastoral internship in the Metropolitan Washington DC Synod and had many opportunities to go into the monument district, and as many times as I went down there, I never tired of looking at the monuments and the Whitehouse and the Capital and so on. Now imagine Jesus and his disciples seeing the largest most beautiful structure in the world, perhaps for the very first time. They, the disciples at least, were filled with awe and wonder, when Jesus said, "Soon it will all fall down."

"What? When?" they asked. And then without really answering the question, Jesus went on a prophetic utterance himself during which he mentioned:

- false prophets
- wars
- insurrections
- nations and kingdoms warring with each other
- earthquakes
- famines
- plagues
- dreadful portents
- arrests

- persecutions
- prison time
- betrayals by family and friends
- death

But don't you worry, not a hair on your head will perish. Oh, you will still be dead, but your hair will look great. The Gospel of the Lord?

Let's move on the Second Reading from Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, shall we. Maybe we can find some gospel there.

Imagine abandoning the faith and religious tradition of your family. Imagine your family turning their back on you and maybe even persecuting you? That was what was happening to the converts to Christianity in Thessalonica.

The faithful Thessalonians had to take care of themselves and others. When I read Thessalonians, I think of communal living, all pitching in, doing what they can to help all survive. But there were apparently a few who were not doing their part and to them Paul wrote, "Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right."

Paul knew that the rest of Thessalonica was watching them, waiting for them to trip up to provide more ammunition to justify their persecutions.

Ish! No obvious gospel there either. Well, I was trained to bring the gospel even when it is not obvious, so buckle up, because here it comes.

God loves all creation, including us so much that he gave us the opportunity to choose to love him back – or not. But when we choose not to love God back, we will likely suffer the consequences of our own sinfulness. This is what happened to the Ancient Israelites again and again. God sent the prophets like Malachi with messages to warn them and to give them hope. And when God got tired of watching his beloved creation beat ourselves up, he sent his own son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sinful selves. Jesus Christ did the saving work on Golgotha's cross two-thousand years ago. And when he resurrected from the dead, he promised to return to end the current age and to usher in a new age unlike any the world has ever known.

The Thessalonians and we ourselves live in the meantime; the time since the Resurrection and yet before his promised return. So the Good News is that our

ancient foe, human sinfulness has been defeated, and all that is asked of us is that we *"Do Not Be Weary in Doing What is Right"* until the Lord returns.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

What does doing right look like? I am so glad you asked. Today, many of you helped at Food Distribution where 200 families were fed. We had planned and procured 140 turkeys, clearly that was not enough, but we didn't panic, we just went out and got more turkeys.

A week from this Thursday we will feed a bunch of the same clients and some of our lonely members and others.

Sunday morning we continue our faith tradition by teaching Sunday School to the faithful of all ages.

We are proud to support Sr. Pat and her "Stepping Stones through the Holidays" program for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

On Thursday, December 5, we will host another Red Cross Blood Drawing, providing life-saving blood to those who need it.

That is what it looks like when the faithful do not weary in doing what is right. No matter your age and ability there is something you can do here, or somewhere else.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, your place in God's eternal kingdom is secure. In the meantime, do not weary in doing what is right so that when the Lord returns he will know us by our love of others and our lives lived to his example.

### **Prayer**

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without you nothing is strong, nothing is holy. Embrace us with your mercy, that with you as our ruler and guide, we may live through what is temporary without losing what is eternal, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen