

Luke 21:5-19

When the end comes, what's next?

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Roy W. Howard

Scholars call this the *little apocalypse* in Luke's gospel. For the people of the time – Jesus, Jews and the followers of Jesus – the destruction of the Temple signaled the end of the world, as they knew it; and *no one was feeling fine*. In fact, most were reeling from real fear and anxiety about what would come next. Their world as they knew it had indeed come to end and yet clearly they were living. Not as Zombies but as disciples living in a whole new world. Sound familiar yet?

We can't over estimate the importance of the Temple for the self-understanding of Jews, Jesus and his followers in the first century. As one scholar put it: "*It was the moral center of the universe from which holiness and justice come forth.*" And by the time this text was written it was utterly in ruins. Destroyed. Along with the meaning it gave to the people. I stood at the site of the Temple just a week ago. The ruins are still present.

Now that world as they knew it had come to an end, the central question facing the disciples of Jesus is what next? *How shall we live into the future that may well be filled with chaos?* Sound familiar? Jesus, reminiscent of Israel's prophets that came before him, does not provide an escape from the future that is to come from the judgment that has occurred. Rather Jesus calls his followers to practice deep discernment of the signs of the time. He cautions them to ***Beware of leaders who declare themselves to be your savior in the time of need. Do not go after them.***

Then he lays out for his followers the suffering that is to come: persecution, betrayal, imprisonment and more. In the end, Jesus says, ***their soul – what we might call their inner well-being - will only come by endurance as they entrust their lives to him.*** It's a sober scenario. What are we to make of it?

What we know is that Temples come and go – and so do all material things. And yes on the Sunday after an election that has left half the country in sorrow and a nation deeply fractured, one must say that history teaches us that Presidents come and go, as do all mortal and material things. ***Christians dare not place our trust in them, for they will always fail us.***

Some Idols are obvious: temples and totems and golden calves. The New Testament makes clear that the new, everlasting Temple is Jesus himself, reconstituted in the body of his followers who place their trust in him alone. Elsewhere, he says of his death and resurrection, *destroy this temple and in three days it will rise*. Jesus is the living temple that cannot be destroyed; those who trust him find their life in him. All else: mortals or material things are merely idols.

But idolatry can be more subtle than a totem pole or an institution. Jesus also understood the temptation to place hope and trust in the ones who come along saying, *believe me; the time is now; I am the only one who can lead you rightly*. **Beware. Do not go after them. To do so is idolatry.** There is only one savior, to whom the followers of Jesus give their allegiance. Such fidelity to Jesus comes at a cost to his followers who, rather than flee from it, place their whole trust in him who promises to be their strength in time of trial, even giving them the words to say when they face those who hate them for their allegiance to Christ alone.

There is an understanding here that the world ended in only one sense. In another sense it goes on and the followers of Jesus continue his life in their lives. That means carrying out his ministry as a form of hope for the new world that is come. For disciples our trust is in Jesus Christ, not in mortals. We have a calling to pay attention for the Spirit at work in the world, discern the times and do what is pleasing to God in all times, until the end of time comes. On the day after the election, a friend of mine said, *God works for good in all things*. We, of course, don't always know precisely how; we have to be on the look out for God working for good. Especially if all we can see is bad. Our vision needs to be constantly cleansed and clarified to see God at work in unlikely place.

I was in Israel and Palestine last week. It is one of the most divided places in the world. Jews, Arabs, Palestinians – Christians, Jews and Muslims - have different narratives that relentlessly collide with each another. Whatever division we encounter here, they have it worse. Our role as rabbis and pastors – people of the Covenant – was to see counter examples of hope in the midst of despair. And yet, we saw signs of people living a new reality rather than stay mired in old pathways that bring nothing new. I found it a lesson in hope that helps me embrace the new time that is upon the followers of Jesus in a fractured country.

I have many examples of hopeful practice from which Christians can learn how to practice hope in our communities; I will give you one today and others later.

Shaul Yudelma is a Jewish teacher and settler who experienced the fear and anger of his local communities as they bury their dead from suicide bombings. He has joined with his enemy, Ai Abu Awwad a leading Palestinian activist and non-violent freedom fighter to establish a center in the West Bank, near a particularly violent checkpoint, where Palestinian and Israeli families share meals and their stories. They do programs attempting to relationships with people who both belong to the land that is holy. Neither has abandoned his people's narrative but both are trying to build a new story; one of reconciliation between avowed enemies, of friendship and compassion. I found it an astonishing example of God at work for good. As one Rabbi said, "Tonight I stood in front of a man who identified himself as a terrorist and I looked into his eyes and I acknowledged his humanity and he acknowledged mine and I wrapped my arms around him and I felt guilt. I will go back and preach that story and remind people that every human being is capable of redemption, becoming greater than what they are."

And they are under threat for doing such work. That is hope against all odds.

I obviously don't know future we will face as our country moves forward with a new President. But I do know that we belong to Jesus. We are his living Temple in a shattered world, not just here but everywhere. Our only hope is in God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and in the work that Jesus calls us to do as his followers, even at great cost to our own lives. That means defending the poor, welcoming the immigrant, mending the broken hearted, protecting the vulnerable. Jews call this work, tikkum olam, which means to repair the world.

The world as we know it may come to an end, again and again, but the world as God knows it is still coming into being. That is our hope and our calling. Let us be fearless and filled with joy, for we know that God works for good in all things.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

