

November 13, 2016  
Luke 21:5-28

Proper 28c  
Hope in a Hopeless World

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.*

Many people in Chicago are sitting high these days...they are marveling at the beauty of a world championship trophy that is finally theirs after so many hopeless years. It was magnificent! Who know maybe the Twins or my Brewers will win next year. It would be magnificent. About half the country are marveling at the outcome of the election. Many think it's magnificent! Many believe this is hope for change in what for many is a hopeless world. But dear Saints – this will come to an end. This will not last...it's only temporary.

Our text today begins on a high note! Jesus's disciples are marveling at the beauty of their beloved temple in Jerusalem. It was magnificent. But Jesus knows that soon—and for much of the rest of their lives—they will face dangers, catastrophes, and most of them, an agonizing death. The majesty of the temple, the security of Jesus' visible presence, even the stability of the world itself, would be torn down, ripped away, crumbled. Then how would they feel? Then where would they find comfort? Where would they find hope?

Perhaps you too have experienced this. Perhaps you have lived in safety and security all your life. Maybe today, you are wondering if that is all changing. Maybe you are thinking, where am I going to find hope?

Here's another question: **Where is God to be found when life is difficult and we have trouble feeling and finding his presence in our lives?**

God is still to be found working in the world! [But Pastor, when I look at the world I see a world that seems as if God is absent!](#)

Where is God when we see so many natural and man-made disasters? Earthquakes in Oklahoma, Italy, and other places. Hurricanes in Haiti, Florida, Carolinas, and other places. Fires in California and Canada.

Where is God when the world is full of wars and violence? Senseless murder of two children in St. Louis by their own father who then committed suicide. Syria's ongoing civil war. The never-ending war on terror in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the mid-east and world.

Where is God all around us we smell moral decay of society? Abortion, homosexual marriage, the transgender bathroom debate, the permissive sexual activity, legalization of drugs that can harm the body, and the list could go on and on and on.

The seeming absence of God in the world should really be of no surprise. After all, when Jesus was predicting the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem He says that the noble stones and offerings of the temple would be thrown down. He listed various terrors and troubles and signs that would occur on earth and in heaven. Worldly destruction and devastation are used by God in fulfillment of his plan. In the first almost 20 verses of our text...Jesus is pointing directly to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem and all these things will take place even before that happens. Even the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem points to the grander destruction of the present world as we know it.

Let me tell...God is present in the world even when all these things make us feel as if He is completely absent. Jesus' whole reason for coming into the world was to reconcile the world to God. Sin had driven a wedge between God and His creation, but the death of Jesus on the cross removed that separation. Now God gives the His Spirit to provide testimony and wisdom in facing persecution. Jesus tells us, *"For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict."*

God will one day rein in evil; evil's time will come to an end. And at last, the Son of Man will return to bring final redemption to the world. As Jesus tells us, *"And when they will see the Son of Man in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* Christ promises to return to bring redemption to all of His Creation, including you.

[God is still to be found present with the believer.](#) But Pastor, it's hard to be a Christian in the world...even with my family, friends, co-workers, and yes, sometimes I hate to admit it, right here at church.

Christianity no longer has a privileged place in society. That's true - you can't run a business based on Christian practices anymore, if so you are taken to court, sued, and perhaps even lose your well-being. Christian bakers and floral shops are finding that out. Christian doctors are caught up in ethical decisions. Ten Commandments, manger scenes and other things in public places are being taken down. Prayer has been out of schools for quite some time. Student-led prayer is even being taken down.

Living morally and passing morality on to our children is increasingly difficult. Television, internet, and other media sources are constantly tempting us to throw our morals away. Even teaching our kids biblical morals is difficult because of what they are taught and exposed in schools, busses, athletics fields, and other activities of life. Internet pornography continues to be rapidly growing industry. It's difficult folks!

The church in our day seems to be shrinking. It does doesn't it? Statistics show us this is happening. For those of you that have been members here for possibly all your life, you saw how "big" the church used to be. I see the number decline even when I talk to my parents at my home church. I see it in the church at large. People are walking

away...and the definition of active member has changed from every week to maybe once a month.

All we think we can do is cry out. **WHERE IS GOD?!**

Times that God might seem to be absent from us, his disciples, his believers, are also to be expected.

Things we think we can cling to as rock solid – like those stones of the temple – will be cast down. In our country – Legal protections we always thought we could count on will be overturned. It's inevitable, it's already starting to happen! Laws and governments are not rocks and stones that we can hang on to for a solid foundation.

More and more we will be called before “kings and governors”—courts and employers—to give an account for our faith. Judge Neely is doing it in Wyoming and there countless others around the country that are facing this as well.

Yes, persecution Christians face is often deeply personal, even dividing family members. Maybe you have experienced this. Maybe you are persecuted for your faith by a brother – a sister, maybe a parent or child, maybe a cousin or aunt or uncle.

Yet God will always be present in the life of the believer despite his apparent absence. The blessings of Jesus' cross have been given to you personally in your Baptism! In your Baptism you received the sign of the Holy Cross both upon your forehead and your heart to make you as one redeemed by Christ the Crucified! You are reconciled to God! He is always with you!

In the face of persecutions, God promises His Spirit to the believer such that opponents will not be able to withstand His wisdom.

In our introit we also spoke: “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” In our Old Testament lesson we heard from Malachi: “But for you who fear my name...you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of Hosts.”

You see God does not abandon or forget His children. Jesus says, “You will be hated by all for my names sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.” When facing personal persecution, remember the promise of God that the hairs of your head are numbered. Remember also, “The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”

God does not and will not abandon or forget His children.

He will ultimately show that to you when the Son of Man comes and returns in great power and glory and bring redemption to all the Earth.

You all have stones that you think your life is built upon. You all have stones that you think can keep you upright, but all those stones will be cast down. It is Christ Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead, who is the real noble stone, the cornerstone of the Church. He is the new and abiding temple. He is the center of our lives. He is the one that gives us comfort and peace. He is the one that provides hope amidst a hopeless world. The Chicago Cubs cannot give you hope in a hopeless. Donald Trump cannot give you hope in a hopeless. Only Jesus Christ, the only stone who will never be cast down, can give you hope in a hopeless world.” Since Christ Jesus is the cornerstone, and we are the Church, the baptized people of God become living stones, out of which God builds spiritual temple.

When you and I face difficulty in our personal journey with God or disappointment with the world, when God seems more absent than present, we are not alone. It's a challenge that goes back to the earliest days of the church, a struggle in the lives of the saints throughout history. In those moments when we're tempted to despair, we do not cling to feelings or despair at the absence of feelings, but rather we embrace the promises of God, whose Word and Spirit never fail to sustain the believer through life...and even unto death.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.*