

WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH



SERMON

November 13, 2022

The Long View

Rev. Louise Rogers

© 2022 by Rev. Louise Rogers and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: November 15, 2022

Luke 21: 5-11, 32-33

⁵Some of his disciples began talking about the beautiful stonework of the Temple and the memorial decorations on the walls. ⁶But Jesus said, “The time is coming when all these things you are admiring will be knocked down, and not one stone will be left on top of another; all will become one vast heap of rubble.”

⁷“Master!” they exclaimed. “When? And will there be any warning ahead of time?”⁸He replied, “Don’t let anyone mislead you. For many will come announcing themselves as the Messiah, and saying, ‘The time has come.’ But don’t believe them!”⁹And when you hear of wars and insurrections beginning, don’t panic. True, wars must come, but the end won’t follow immediately—¹⁰for nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom,¹¹and there will be great earthquakes, and famines in many lands, and epidemics, and terrifying things happening in the heavens.

³²“I solemnly declare to you that when these things happen, the end of this age has come.”³³And though all heaven and earth shall pass away, yet my words remain forever true.

We all have our morning routines. We get up from bed, brush our teeth, shower, dress, have breakfast with tea or coffee to start our day. Some days, especially when it is cold and rainy, how hard it is to get out of bed. Technology is coming into this

routine more and more. Our alarm is set by Google. When the alarm goes off and my eyes are barely open, I say, “Hey Google, good morning.” Immediately the weather forecast for my neighborhood comes on. Then the world headlines are announced. Last week, North Korea shot missiles at South Korea, Russia surged ahead in the horrific war in Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Pakistan had a skirmish along their border. Nations rise up against nations, all before the sun has risen in our sky. The world is an unsettled place.

These troubling headlines echo the words preached by Jesus when he spoke of future events. Jesus and the disciples gathered in Jerusalem beside Herod’s temple. The disciples stood in awe gazing at the sun reflecting off of Herod’s temple bleached limestone walls in the courtyard in Jerusalem. The temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world with walls which were covered with so much gold that when the sunlight reflected off the walls it practically blinded anyone who looked in that direction. The majestic temple, with giant block stones measuring eight feet, stunned the disciples as they strolled. They found hundreds of people milling in the courtyards and patios outside the temple. This was the center of communal life along with the holiest place in all Israel. Someone said, “Look, what large stones and what large buildings!” Everyone marveled at the grandeur. So, you can imagine the disciple’s dismay when Jesus asked, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” All will be thrown down, destroyed? Really? Who invited **Apocalyptic** Jesus?

Last week we heard the anthem, “Come to me, you who are weak and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” These are the teachings of comfort and love we long for in our weary days. While Jesus does extend that invitation, he also teaches followers about future events that will be troubling, violent, where kingdom will rise against kingdom before the second coming. Apocalyptic Jesus has arrived. We don’t hear much about this side of Jesus who will come again appearing on the clouds. Yet we profess this truth each time we recite the Apostles Creed. “He will come again to judge the quick and the dead.”

Those who hear Jesus are immediately alarmed—but they don’t seem surprised. Jesus’ hearers are well acquainted with calamity and crisis. They can readily imagine sudden disaster, can imagine even the destruction of the temple—the place of God’s presence at the center of the people and the nation. In their history two other times the temple has been destroyed and then rebuilt. They don’t waste time wringing their hands or wondering why or how such devastation might come. They just want to know when it will be coming. What are the signs? “Wars, insurrections, false teachers along with natural disasters” Jesus also declares, “But to the day and time we do not know.” “So be alert at all times.” “Stand firm in your faith.” “I am always with you to the end of the age.”

These words from Luke’s gospel have been heard from believers for over two thousand years. While they are

mysterious, they are also hopeful as they promise that one day the Lord will come in glory. The church is called to remain true to Christ in all circumstances. The church is the corporate body of believers, remains faithful and drawn together by the Holy Spirit. We see the arc of faith firmly established despite all the unsettling events that occur in the world. Of course, the specific ways of practicing the faith will continue to evolve.

Consider if a devout medieval Christian from 1,000 years ago, dropped into our service today she would not recognize her faith. The strong music, the focus on Bible-reading, the unadorned architecture, the lack of ornate ritual, the conversational tone of the sermon – all would be baffling at best. The 10th-century Christian lived in a world where only 18% of the people were fellow believers, even in Europe.

We do well to consider how our church will evolve in the coming centuries. Our church will continue to evolve in extraordinary ways claims Kevin Kelly in his article “The Next 1,000 of Christianity.” Here are a few of the stones that will either be moved, thrown down, or created in the years to come.

- The center of the church continues to move west. As the numbers above suggest, Asia and Africa are experiencing phenomenal rates of Christian church growth. Today African churches send more missionaries to the West than the West send to Africa.

- The number of creeds, denominations, and varieties of faith will continue to increase as they have from the first days of the church.
- The natural world is seen to be our home, and our responsibility. It is ours. For this and other reasons, environmental, ecological, and natural issues will continue to grow in importance in Christian culture.
- Of all the challenges one can imagine Christianity facing in the next 1,000 years, at least 95% of them will be driven by new technologies. The long-term trend is more technology in the Christian culture; what is missing, and what may take several generations to supply, is an understanding of the spiritual meaning of technology.

How do we live today when we don't know tomorrow? We draw strength from God, who invites our participation and endures long after the cities and buildings and stones have crumbled. We adopt a posture that asks not what God can do for us but calls us to bring the Kingdom of God just a bit closer as we pray without ceasing. We love one another and serve brothers and sisters with compassion and kindness. We love neighbors as self and we strive for just societies and a stable planet. That's not a simple answer, but it's a posture we can strive to adopt.

We can look to the saints who have gone before us in faith to learn from their witness in living for God. Martin Luther was one such saint who lived for Christ. He was asked what to do if he thought the end was coming tomorrow. His advice? "Plant a

tree.” In other words, invest hopefully in the future - we trust in a mighty God from whom all blessings flow.



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630
www.westminster-church.org