

Walking with Hope (Lent 5)

Luke 21:5-8

April 3, 2022

First Presbyterian, Luling

Recently, I was with a small gathering of people, and someone was asking some of those “If you could be an animal, what animal would you be?” types of questions. That’s generally not my favorite activity, but then she asked a thought provoking one: “If you could be one person for a day, who would you be?” Some people answered with celebrities, but for good and thoughtful reasons, not just to be famous. I was sitting there pondering, and I came up with something quite different. “Vladimir Putin,” I answered. Well, that stopped the conversation. So then I had to say why. “If I could be Vladimir Putin for a day, I’d stop the war and then resign from being the Russian President. Surely the world would be a better place.” Well, yes, surely. But then it occurred to me that there’s any number of cruel dictators I would need to be for a day to really fix anything. And then that thought sent me into a familiar spiral of despair about the state of the world. I’ve had several conversations recently—with several of you and with other people—about how we can’t even watch the news anymore. The problems seem insurmountable and out of anyone’s control and there doesn’t seem to be much to fill us with hope.

On top of that familiar litany of terrible things, then to read this passage from Luke about the destruction of the Temple and false prophets, along with the knowledge that in just a few days, we’ll remember the crucifixion, well, it all seems a bit too much gloom and doom and despair.

So it was a bit of an adjustment to read the theme for the week from the devotional series. “Walking with Hope.” Hm. Hope is in short supply, both in our world and in the scripture reading. And Walking WITH Hope was interesting. Not walking in hope, or walking toward hope, or walking by hope. Walking with hope. What image pops into your mind? I’m not sure this is at all what the author of the devotional series intended, or even if she put this much thought into her preposition choice, but what walking WITH hope makes me think of is walking with a cane, or walking with crutches, or walking with a walker. That idea that in order to be safe, to be secure, to be supported, we need something to help us walk. We need to walk with *something*. And that *something* we need to walk with, right now, is hope.

Jesus and the disciples have been in Jerusalem for a while. They’ve been

hanging out at the Temple for a while—since the beginning of chapter 20, but it's hard to say if that's all been one day or several. Regardless, several confrontations with the Temple authorities have just happened. He's denounced the scribes. They've just watched a widow put all her coins into the treasury and Jesus has compared her favorably to all of the people who are much richer than she is, richer in money but not in faith. And then he launches into an entire chapter of apocalyptic predictions of destruction and the coming of the end. It doesn't sound too hopeful.

For a long time, generations, the Jewish people had placed their hope in God, of course, but they located God in the holiest of places, in the Temple. Not that God was absent elsewhere, but God was especially present in the Temple. There are chapters and chapters about the decision to build, and re-build the Temple, construction instructions, rules and regulations about the Temple and its activities and organization. And tradition had added on to all of that. It was the most sacred place, the most sacred building, the most sacred city, they could imagine. Maybe you have a sacred, holy place of your own, and so you know how they felt about it.

For Jesus, then, to say that the Temple would be destroyed—well, that was distressing, to say the least. The very place where they felt that God was most accessible, would be destroyed. What Jesus is saying to them—to us—is that God is that accessible everywhere. Things are bad. The situation is serious. And things will get worse. By verse 18 and 19, though, which the devotional gets to later in the week, Jesus is promising them that they will not perish, that by endurance they will gain their souls. In short, Jesus is giving them hope in the midst of horror and destruction and despair.

When we walk with hope, like a walker or cane or crutches, hope can be our constant companion. No matter where we go, what kind of terrain or territory, hope is right there with us, because we're walking with hope, and hope is walking with us. Hope is upholding us, keeping us safe, reassuring us when we feel unsteady or insecure. When the world seems to be falling apart around us, hope assures us that God is present, that God is here. When the things and people we had placed our trust in fail and fall, hope holds us up, steadies us, keeps us walking in God's presence.

Paul tells us, at the end of chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians, that faith, hope, and love, abide; but the greatest of these is love. Yes, the greatest of the three is love. But to know that faith and hope abide and endure and uphold—that is a great gift, too.

