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Luke 21:5-19
Meet Us Here, O God

I read and re-read the gospel text every day last week. I read commentaries, re-read the passage, and kept putting my books down, puzzled. Perhaps I'm super dense or perhaps I have a big piece of learning here . . . either way, I have just had a really hard time understanding and keeping this passage straight in my head. I finally summarized it into 5 sections:

1. people are admiring the Temple, a super important symbol of the Jewish faith.
2. Jesus says: all will be thrown down, basically things will fall apart.
3. These are the signs that will tell you things are falling apart.
4. A description of what life will look like in the mean time
5. Here is how you will get through life in the mean time.

Scholars pretty much agree this passage is specifically talking about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in the year 70 CE. The historical Jesus may have indeed foretold the destruction of the temple during his ministry; if he did, he certainly wasn't the first person to do so. Luke is writing his gospel about 15 years after the temple is destroyed, so regardless of what Jesus was aware of in his life, Luke has knowledge of this event and what life was like for Jesus' disciples in that 40 year gap . . . he knows this as he sits and shapes **his** gospel of Jesus Christ for his community.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning, in Christ Jesus we pray, Amen.

Have you been to Sandwell recently? If there is a cathedral for me on Gabriola, that's it. Walking along the path toward the beach, I find myself in awe of the rock cliff up to the left and the giant boulders that sit along the trail. We particularly like to go at low tide, because if you take the path off to the right, down the staircase, there is a collection of equally huge boulders on the beach that, as you know, are only visible at low tide. Around the boulders are colonies of sea stars, anemones, and between the rocks are tide pools with any number of lovely creatures – I always try to be mindful of Joy (border collie) trampling through the tiny habitats or dropping sticks on little fish and crabs. I was

taking it all in one day, when I realized something happened here a long time ago. Boulders don't appear on the beach out of nowhere . . . and they're all in one area. The cliff above looks stable and stationary, secure, but nature has taught us over thousands of years that everything in creation is dynamic. Things like sheer rock face cliffs seem so grand and unchanging, because for them change happens over such long periods of time . . . but clearly at some point the cliff gave way and part of it tumbled onto the beach. It was probably a shock to the resident creatures, to experience their world changing in this way.

In the gospel this morning Jesus doesn't pull any punches. He says quite plainly that there will come a time where these stones will be thrown down (speaking of the temple) . . . the world as we know it will cease to exist . . . but it's the intervening time before this event that Jesus is particularly concerned with. Knowing his followers will endure years of persecution, he says: do not be led astray; do not be terrified; I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict; but no a hair on your head will perish and by your endurance you will gain your souls.

Jesus words resonated for first century Christians, but don't you think every generation, at some time in its history, has thought, this is the end of the world as we know it.¹ We're no different . . . Jesus' words ring in my own ears in an interesting way. Luke has Jesus looking ahead 40 years, knowing the destruction that will take place. Here we are . . . what a crazy time to be alive. We have political divisions within and between the most powerful countries in the world, the center of global political power is in flux, and the planet continues to warm from the pollution created as a result of things like governmental and corporate policies and modern cultural norms. If we look ahead through the next 40 years, we find ourselves in this critical time, where we know even if we do everything right from here on, some of the effects are inevitable.

¹ Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 4, 308

What do you find yourself thinking and feeling these days about our changing climate? Do you find yourself doing anything differently . . . or wondering if there is anything you really can do? Where do you find yourself resistant? And from what can you not turn away?

It's odd to *know* something is going to happen. I invite us to allow Jesus' words to ring in *our* ears: do not be led astray; do not be terrified; I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict; but not a hair on your head will perish and by your endurance you will gain your souls.

How much confidence in God does this call for? I think responding to this text requires us first and foremost to locate the centre of our faith, the assurance we carry of God's faithfulness. Perhaps for you it is words of Jesus, something someone told you when you were young, experiences you've had, or maybe you don't have confidence in God . . . maybe you'd like to. But I think this is the place to start, because all of the things Jesus mentions are dependant on that trust . . . dependant on us knowing our primary home is in God. When we know this and trust in God, we are (generally) the best versions of ourselves.

In the face of chaos and suffering humans are more likely to fear, distrust, avoid. But Jesus gives us a kind of road map to face what is before us; not to toast tonight that tomorrow we may perish . . . but to engage, to act, to resist . . . to muster courage in the face of fear, speak truth to power and address the injustice for future generations.² Perhaps in that moment of deep courage, you hear the voice of God as your own. And, what does Jesus say again? "By your endurance, you will gain your souls." In speaking our truth and being congruent, our souls find their home in us. So, meet us here, O God, and help us to trust in you so that we can do the things we cannot turn from . . . things we thought were impossible for us, but are possible with you.

Like you, I know in 40 years the earth will be warmer . . . the effects will be significant. And I hate that. I think it's easier in the moment for me to spin up into feelings than to ground into God. But again,

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we're playing the long game . . . and in the long game I believe in the resurrection, not just of Jesus, but I believe Jesus' resurrection shows us the truth that resurrection is God's way. It shows us that God continues to work in the world and transforms brokenness, injustice, and death.

I walk the beach at Sandwell at low tide and delight in the sea stars and crabs that long ago moved into the habitat created by the fallen stone. Walking back up the hill and along the path, I see the trees and plants have grown up, winding around the boulders, because life is persistent, adaptable . . . and God is still speaking and creating in collaboration with us. God brings life in new forms to fit the given conditions, on a planet, which has always been dynamic and changing. In 40 more years, there will still be more story for another generation to tell.