

Doomsday's Not Yet—Not Ever! [Scott Kinder-Pyle]
Luke 21:5—19

Endurance. Today I'd like to listen to what Jesus has to say about "endurance," which is a word we often associate with athletics, or with the physical conditioning of the athlete, whose body has developed the stamina to endure. But it's also interesting to note that when Greek infants were being weaned by their mothers, as a means of offering comfort, the mothers would whisper, *hupomene, hupomene, hupomene*—which means 'patiently endure,' 'endure patiently,' 'hang on,' 'it's going to be okay in the end,' 'in the end you're going to be satisfied...' And, you see, coming from the lips of the person with whom they had bonded, those four syllables meant the world. And I find it fascinating that Luke's Gospel puts the word *hupomene* on the lips of Jesus, and in verse 19 of chapter twenty-one, we hear it: "***By your endurance, you will gain your souls.***" We hear it. And yet, now that we've heard it, are we prepared to be weaned of the mother's milk?—which is to say, are we ready to to be nourished by something more, something we're going to have to chew, something that's going to enhance the spiritual energy that's already been growing inside us?

Today, as many of you know, Northwood Presbyterian Church will be receiving various pledges—and of course those pledges are going to help as we plan for the ministry in the year ahead. But when someone pledges they themselves are also growing and in some ways, breaking away from a previous and more passive way of receiving the milk of mother church. And, ultimately speaking, the disciple of Jesus who promises to give time, talent and treasure now is the one who promises to *endure* to the end—and by *end*, Jesus seems to mean, the *goal*.

Now, I want to make this absolutely clear because I think Jesus is fairly clear on this: the goal he has in mind is neither the maintenance nor the embellishment of the temple in Jerusalem. For that, in fact, the dynasty of King Herod the Great and his son, Herod Antipas, has already cornered the market. Each of these political lackeys for the Roman Empire has done their utmost to raise funds for the on-going renovations of the temple, including lots of glittering gold and lots of precious, well-appointed stones. Wealthy patrons even saw their names inscribed in the building blocks of temple courts. More modest contributions also came in the form of a temple tax, which was extracted from the lower classes in addition to their buying and the selling of sacrificial animals. And so, just imagine how these peasant fishermen from the backwater of Galilee, are so impressed—not only with the grandeur, but with the whole money-making apparatus. And yet:

“When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, [Jesus] said, ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’”

So that’s pretty clear, isn’t it? What Jesus has in mind *as the end-goal* for his disciples has nothing to do with the perpetuation of the temple; and maybe, in his matter-of-fact way, he’s trying to get them to wean themselves off of their infatuation. And what if that’s what we’re doing this morning. This morning, we making a pledge to endure to the end—and that has nothing to do with all the things that we see—some of which may be falling down around our ears before the century’s out. No, I’m not up here, predicting anything dire. I have no doomsday scenario to scare you. I can offer no secret blueprint of so-called biblical prophecies which count down how many days we have till Armageddon. What’s I’m hearing from Jesus is NOT YET.

I love that scene in the Monty-Python flick, *The Life of Brian*, in which someone who lives around the same time as Jesus—someone named ‘Brian’—becomes caught up in the crowd of those speculating about the coming of the Messiah. Many people are following him, and he doesn’t like it. In fact, at one point, while running away from them, Brian loses one of his sandals and hops on one foot. The followers then stop in their tracks, pay homage to the shoe, and from the mob comes this exclamation: “It’s a sign! It’s a sign that we’re all meant to remove one of sandals and hop on one foot!” Finally, however, Brian stops running and confronts the spectacle. Everyone quiets down to hear him say, “Look! You’ve got it all wrong. You don’t need to follow me. You don’t need to follow anyone. You’ve got to think for yourselves. You’re all individuals.” And then, after a brief pause, those who won’t disburse chant in unison, “Yes, We’re All Individuals!”

You see, in contrast to this group-think and to the suspension of critical thinking, Jesus prompts us with a courageous endurance. Doomsday is NOT YET—and contrary to what so many eschatological experts tout—it’s this present stretch of time that requires attention and perseverance.

- Verse 8: “... **many will come in my name**” and say something like, ‘only I can fix this’—***“Do not go after them.”***
- Verse 9: ***“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified...”***
- Verse 10: ***“Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”***
- Verse 11: ***“There will be earthquakes and in various places, famines and plagues and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.”***

All this sounds rather daunting, doesn't it?

That's sounds like Doom and Gloom, doesn't it? So why pledge? Why commit to the ministries of a church full of frail children, when you can just as soon stay home and batten down the hatches? A few weeks ago, Sheryl and I found ourselves driving north, on our way to visit the Cathcarts in Colbert. And, of course, we failed to take traffic into account. And at one point we came to a dead-stop behind a long long of headlights and brake-lights; and we saw in the flicker of those lights the ornate, well-appointed—but incomplete—North/South Freeway. There it was, over forty years under construction—almost like the re-built temple in Jerusalem. And yet, at a cost of 1.7 million and counting, I wonder if you will believe me when I tell you, eventually, ultimately, all of this new construction will be rubble. Don't get me wrong. If I live long enough to see it span the Spokane River, I'm going to be a happy commuter. But I seriously doubt that Jesus would have me live for that—with the convenience of an easy commute as my End-Goal.

On the contrary, what the Crucified and Risen Christ invites us into is something that may be a little inconvenient—and more than inconvenient, a little hazardous: ***“they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons; and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.”*** And if verse 12 weren't bad enough, there's verse 16: ***“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death.”*** In other words—this is the time of *Not Yet*. Endure it.

Hupomene, Hupomene, Hupomene... In his book, *Notes on a Nervous Planet*, Matt Haig writes,

“I think the world is always going to be a mess. And I am always going to be a mess. Maybe you're a mess too. But—and this bit is everything for me—I believe it's possible to be a happy mess. Or, at least, a less miserable mess. A mess who can cope... The problem is not that the world is a mess, but that we expect it to be otherwise” [162].

Endure. Pledge that you will endure it. And ***“by your endurance, you will gain your souls.”***

On December 24th, 1967, when everyone at church was hoping to cocoon into a nice cozy Christmas Eve Service, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said this:

“Somehow we must be able to stand up against our most bitter opponents and say, ‘We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you... But be assured that we’ll wear you down...’”

Doomsday is *Not Yet*. The world, *as we know it*, the world of institutionalized racism and injustice, is wearing down. And the question is—are we willing to believe in the world we don’t know quite yet? What about the world God knows and loves and seeks to reconcile? What about the world without end that we sing about in the *Gloria Patri*. A few months after, Dr. King preached those words about endurance of suffering, on April 4, 1968, he was shot dead on a shoddy hotel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. And why was he in Memphis? He was there to support sanitation workers—‘Garbage Collectors’—who wanted a livable salary with which to support their families. And isn’t that interesting? What’s garbage except debris? And what’s debris except *“all will be thrown down”*? But the end is not yet. Everything that you see standing is going to be a mess if it’s not already. And, of course, four decades later, in 70 AD, there’s a Jewish Revolt and the Romans raze all of it to the ground. Now, is the point that Jesus knew this in advance?

I don’t think so. ***“So make up your minds,”*** he says in Luke 21:14-15,

“NOT to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.”

Huh, that's really weird. I can recall many other places and many parables in which Jesus seems to encourage his followers to get ready, to be prepared, to trim our wicks, to make sure we have enough oil in our lamps, to stay awake because the Son of Man is coming like a thief in the night... In fact, the upcoming Season of Advent has been established under the banner of Isaiah 40: ***“Prepare the Way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God...”*** But here, when it comes to defending ourselves... [pause] hmmm... with premeditated words or with talking points or with rational arguments or with shouted opinions, Jesus says to ***make up your minds NOT TO PREPARE...*** And what kind of pledge is that?

Recently, I flew back east to visit with my older brother, Bobby, who's been diagnosed with lung cancer. And as I approached his house, my sister had told me about an argument that he had had with my 96 year old mother. Obviously, with some unresolved issues, he said to her, “Words matter! Words matter, Mom!” And, with that on my mind, I also recalled the many Thanksgiving Day meals we've had in which Bobby and I would get into these verbal jousting sessions. And so, I learned over the years to plan out my words... But here's what happened: after an hour or so of catching up and chit-chat, I wondered aloud if I could pray. I hadn't prepared anything special... but just as I was about to open my mouth, Bobby spoke to me and he spoke to God. He spoke clearly out of his suffering, in the light of the possibility that his world might be coming to an end. His mind was settled. The world, as he knew it, might be going dark. But there's another world—a world without end. Amen.