

“Stand firm!”

Sermon on Sunday, November 16, 2025

Dear church,

The scary passages of the Bible always come late in the year. Past Halloween, it's scary time in our Lectionary. While nature descends into darkness outside, in the Sunday readings, Jesus talks about the skeletons and spiderwebs of human life, times of suffering and persecution, even the end of times. Frankly, it's hard to see anything good that comes out of today's lesson, but it's there, I promise... and blessed are those who hear it and take it to heart!

O.k., the truth is - the good news is hidden under the mud here in Luke 21 - a lot of mud! Like the treasure that Jesus compared to the kingdom of God, which was hidden in a field under ordinary dirt where nobody expected it. I'd say, just like in real life! Sometimes we must work hard and dig hard to find anything good, to think and pray positively, to stand firm when things are shaky or downright scary. Do you know what I mean? Have you been through times like that? I have. It's hard then to appreciate the life God has given us. It's easy then to lose your faith. We feel lost.

I saw a good old friend when I was overseas. Last Monday I drove from Switzerland to the Black Forest in Germany where he has been in a clinic for more than three months, dealing with a lot of mud that has come to the surface from deep within, paralyzing his spirit, rendering him unable to work or enjoying life, shutting him down. It was hard to see him that way. We took a nice long nature walk and talked and shared friendship. Nothing dramatic, but I would say: blessed are those who have friends during those times. Remember Job from the Old Testament? His friends sat with him for days when his life had fallen apart and there was no quick turnaround.

Or think of our friends in Ukraine right now, - Pastor Ihor Shemihon, his wife Olga, their elderly congregants in Kyiv - the destroyed cities, the air raids, the wounded, the dead. At times, I imagine, it must feel like the end, almost four years into this disaster. And yet, by all indications, they are standing firm. Can we learn from that? Yes, we can. Because times are rarely all quiet, peaceful and without care. There always seems to be some turmoil, whether it comes from outside or from within. Blessed are who have spiritual resources and strength during those times. That's what Jesus is talking about!

His 1st century forecast for Israel is not unique to this world. *Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will*

be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”

Let's unpack this. Wars are not unique. They are raging in several parts of our globe as we sit here this morning. Earthquakes are not unique. They erupt and disrupt communities situated on top of tectonic plates that converge deep underneath the crust of the earth - with some frequency and unpredictable force, taking a toll on humans, life stock and buildings. Kingdoms and political entities, they come and go when you look at it from a historical perspective. Nobody guarantees that this country will be on top in a hundred years. In fact, signs are pointing towards decline, and that's not unusual. And you ask me: "Is there now some good news? We are already flooded with bad news. Don't give us more..."

Well, the gospel for this Sunday is about resiliency, something that is in high demand right now in the Western world and in the church, standing firm, trusting in something that is more powerful and reliable than our feelings, or the so-called objective situation or the forecast people are conjuring up. A timid faith will tempt you to believe that things aren't so bad, that things will end up o.k., will be nice and good. Make no mistake, in the Old Testament those voices are called the false prophets. They deceive you and keep you in a state of denial. That kind of religion can be like a drug. But true faith will enable us to acknowledge and face whatever we are dealing with - and not fold. It doesn't matter what it is: chronic disease, terminal illness, despair over the state of the world. True faith empowers us to see things - and not fold. That's what the gospel for this Sunday is all about, even if it speaks in examples that were more real to Christians in the 1st century, such as the destruction of Jerusalem. But we have no shortage of issues that worry us to the bone, do we? So, this text is all about resilience and strength during difficult times. "Stand firm," Jesus said.

In two weeks, I will make a presentation about Adenauer, one of the most important if almost forgotten statesman of the 20th century. He embodied that kind of resilience, grit and strength. A man of faith. I don't want to give away too much. You will have to come and attend the session. In the meantime, let us learn to trust God and stand firm in the craziness of our times. That's what Jesus asks of us today.

Amen.