

The Time Will Come

Luke 21:5-19

Introduction

I woke up hopeful Wednesday morning.

There's an old joke that comes to mind. "I woke up grumpy today. But she told me to leave her alone and went back to sleep."

I'm not referring to that joke. I did wake up hopeful. I am optimistic by nature, so that in itself is not unusual. It was November and the temperature was going to be in the 70s. There was bacon in the refrigerator. A good day.

But on that day I woke up hopeful mostly because Election 2022 was over. No more campaign ads. No more political posturing. It was done. Over. See you next year.

- How naïve I can be sometimes! For it was not so.
- It will be days and weeks yet before that is the case. Georgia now enters a runoff election for its Senate seat because no one won more than 50% of the vote.
- As of that Wednesday several other races were still "too close to call."

What will the final outcome be?

Now, I want you to take that question and think with me about the church year calendar and today's Gospel lesson. How about that for a whiplash transition?

This is the next-to-the-last Sunday in the Christian calendar year. It has no special name other than Pentecost 23. For the last couple of weeks, our Sundays have had specific names: Reformation Day, All Saints' Day. In the weeks to come, we will have Epiphany and Baptism of our Lord. But nothing fancy today. Just Pentecost 23. The 23rd Sunday of Pentecost. That name tells us that I have been wearing a green stole for a long time – 23 Sundays, in fact.

Next Sunday, though, is another big day with another special name. Next Sunday is the climax of the entire Christian year. Next Sunday is "Christ the King Sunday," a day we celebrate that Jesus wins! The plan of God that was established before Genesis 1:1 has been completed. The entire story of the Bible culminates in what we will celebrate next Sunday.

- And then the following week is the beginning of Advent, and we start telling the story all over again.
- But today is just Pentecost 23.

But even though it doesn't have a special name, something very important is happening on this day. The whole story of God's salvation plan has been unfolding over the last 50 weeks. And are about to proclaim "Christ is King!"

But today the outcome is still uncertain. Not uncertain for us, because we know that next week Christ is King. But the Satan hasn't given his concession speech yet. He is still campaigning. He still thinks he can win.

Before Christ can be declared King, the devil is going to make a last-ditch effort to stop it. In the events surrounding this week's gospel, the devil attempts to rally all the forces of hell. All those powers that oppose the work of Jesus are zeroing in on this moment, trying to stop God's plan from being fulfilled.

Let me set the context. This morning we are in Luke chapter 21.

- Back up to chapter 19, verse 28. There Jesus had finally reached the end of his journey to Jerusalem. He entered the city riding on that donkey, remember? He listened as the people shouted "Hosanna!"
- Then moments after He got off the donkey, He went into the Temple and drove all the money traders out with a whip.
- Jesus then spent the rest of the day teaching anybody who would listen. The Scriptures tell us the crowd was made up of his disciples, the people who shouted Hosanna, and the religious leaders. All there. Listening.
- Luke tells us that it was the combination of what Jesus did and what He said that brought the Jewish leaders to a full boil. They had enough of this upstart from Nazareth.
- But as eager as they were to bring about Jesus' death, the crowds felt differently.

The chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words. (Luke 19:47-48)

- And so ends chapter 19.
- All throughout chapter 20 Jesus is repeatedly tested and challenged and each time He silences his opponents. They can't trap Him, and their frustration level grows.

But then in chapter 21 Jesus turns His teaching to his disciples. He begins to tell them about what is ahead and to remind them they need to remain faithful when it looks like everything is falling apart.

Our text is at the beginning of a long speech to the disciples. It is a speech to insiders, spoken to those who already follow Jesus and to those of us who follow later, to the church.

- Jesus speaks these words around A.D. 30-33, depending on when you date His crucifixion.
- Luke will write his Gospel somewhere around A.D. 80, maybe as late as A.D. 90.
- By the time Luke wrote, almost everything Jesus said in these verses would have indeed happened.
 - Jerusalem had fallen.
 - The beautiful Temple was now a pile of rubble

- There had been earthquakes and famines.
- And many of those who followed Jesus had indeed been handed over to kings and governors and had opportunity to testify. Some had been martyred. The Apostle James, for example, had been stoned to death on orders from the Jewish High Priest in A.D. 62

All of this leads me to the point where I share with you three truths:

TRUTH #1: WHAT JESUS SAYS CAN BE TRUSTED

In the book of Deuteronomy, the people are struggling with an age-old question:

How can we know when a message has not been spoken by God?
(Deuteronomy 18:21)

Their world was filled with people claiming to speak on behalf of God. "Listen to me. I have a new word from God."

Moses gives them a very simple solution to their problem:

If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. (Deuteronomy 18:22)

Later Scriptures add the instruction that if the prophet isn't speaking God's message, he should be stoned to death ... which always causes me to be careful about what I preach to you!

Here in our text Jesus tells His followers what is going to come, and it happens. Just like He said.

Because Jesus was clearly correct about those things I can have confidence in everything else that He says to me.

This is a scary passage of Scripture. Jesus talks about a lot of horrible things in the passage. That's not a new message Him though. Through His time on earth Jesus repeatedly taught that the things of this world would grow increasingly hostile to His followers. I like how it is phrased in John 16:33:

Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world. (John 16:33, NLT)

That leads me to the second truth:

TRUTH #2: VICTORY IS WON BY GOING THROUGH THE TRIALS, NOT BY AVOIDING THEM

Jesus proclaims that truth in the last verse of our text:

Stand firm, and you will win life. (Luke 6:19)

Stand firm in your faith. Be anchored in the truth proclaimed by Jesus. As we used to sing when I was younger:

Faith is the victory that overcomes the world!

Overcomes. Remember that word? I just read it to you from John 16:33. "Take heart, I have overcome the world. That hymn is based on verses recorded in 1 John:

And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 4:4-5, ESV)

We overcome by standing firm in our faith when those trials come. "Through" is not an easy road. But it is the only one that leads us to the place of victory. So when things are tough, the best prayer is always:

Lord, lead me through.

So you might say, "Tom, that's easier said than done." I agree. But I didn't say it. Jesus said it. And if Jesus says it, I can trust Him. Remember Truth #1? So how do I do it? Well, here's what Jesus said:

1. Don't be afraid.

When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. (Luke 21:9)

We learned last week in our Sunday School class that this is the most frequently repeated command in Scripture. Here it is again. Whether the war is global or local, there is no need to fear.

2. Don't be misled by those who offer a different way. You will hear many other options. Stand firm in what Jesus says.

For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. (Luke 21:8)

3. Don't panic if you don't know the next step. God has it under control. Just follow Him.

But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. (Luke 21:14)

I like to know where I am going. That is one of the ongoing arguments I have with my GPS. It only tells me where to go at the very last minute. "In a half mile, turn right." If I

trust it, it will get me safely to my destination. But it doesn't tell me what I need to know until the very last minute.

All of this brings me to the last truth for today.

TRUTH #3: CHRIST IS KING

We will celebrate that next week. But it is still true this week.

Most of our lives – if not all of our lives – are lived in the week of Pentecost 23. The devil is refusing to make a concession speech. He is fighting until the final ballot is counted, and he believes he can pull off an upset. And so the battle rages on for just a little while.

Don't be afraid. Don't be misled. And don't worry. Christ wins.

And next week we will proclaim!

Amen.