Sermon Sunday 17th November Stones, destruction and endurance

Luke 21:5-19

Well I have struggled with this Gospel passage today. If it were weather I’d call it dreich.

If it were food it would be salt porridge or gruel.

If it were an atmosphere it would be damp with the possibility of lightening; soil – mud with a threat of landslides.

We can reduce the text to 3 words.

First word…..

**Stones.**

I have a bit of a liking for Grand Designs, probably less to do with the houses and more about “ The dream home” and what it does to people; in terms of people who build castles and the child is in a dark shed for 3 years in the process or the home which completely took the light and view from the parents’ home for the sake of the dream and the birth of the new baby was overshadowed by the detailing on a window frame. There is something inherently wrong from a Christian perspective when we value the **material over the relational. Stones over people.**

**Stones**

 The Temple in Luke’s Gospel has been perceived until now as a positive sacred space; we have Simeon ( 2:27)entering the Temple guided by the Spirit[[1]](#footnote-1) ; we have Jesus found in the Temple( 2: 46)

 the Temple being described further as a place of fasting and prayer ( 2:37); and we have Jesus attempts to protect the Temple as a house of prayer in Chapter 19 ( 19:45).and at the end of the Gospel the disciples were continually in the Temple ( 24:53). The positive view of the Temple continues throughout Acts. Today’s passage seems to sit in sharp contrast.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Stones**

 In this time, in this space we decorate, open up the light to the space, work out where we put the stuff and respond to questions like “ Have you thrown this out, Kay”. I remember saying to the Vicar of our previous parish ,” Why do we spend so much time doing practical things in relation to the church when we have vestry, surely we are here to worship”. He said, “If we deal well with the detail of the fabric the worship can be unencumbered ” There is something in that for me, but we run the risk of worshipping the stones, the grand design, the fabric of the place and **not the sense of the space being a container for worship not the r**elationship as the people of God with one another. We are the stones, we are the fabric we are the weave of words, song and prayer to the Divine in our midst. We are guardians, custodians and curators of this space and we would continue as the people of God in adversity as we are encouraged to do as we go on in our Gospel reading..

WORD 2

**Destruction**

In Grand designs the houses got built , in my view at the cost of relationships.

**Destruction**

The prediction of the destruction of the Temple . Jesus here predicts what did eventuate in 70 BCE , the destruction of the Temple by the Romans. The Lucan account is written after this date and one commentator suggests that this account is more about the bricks and mortar of what is predicted (and comes to be) about the death of the sacred place of pilgrimage and worship rather than a metaphor for the end times.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Destruction**

We may be facing implosion in the life of the church as we know it. I have said to some of you there seems to be a tension in the role of Anglican clergy right now-are we delivering hospice care whilst at the very same time being present as midwives, receptive to the rebirth of church as we know it. Death and life is what we are all about – death to self in the waters of baptism, new life in Christ as we farewell our dead who no longer need their bodies in their present form.

WORD 3

**Endurance**

 In Grand Designs world – there is always something of an outcome , a reckoning, be it nearing completion of fulfilling the dream or holding the hope for it all being worth it in material terms.

**Endurance.**

Perhaps this part of today’s Gospel can lift our spirits amid the mayhem of persecution and the very fabric of the earth heaving. Jesus tells us to be prepared to testify but not have a prepared speech but be open to the words placed on our lips by the divine source. (story) All will not go well, our nearest and dearest will no longer be trusted, families will break up. But know that “ **not a hair on you head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls**. “

The stones, the destruction seem very tangible and real , then we seem to slip into the deep and enduring nature of what it means to be present to God and how we are birthed into a way of intimacy and love which preserves and protects us.

**Endurance**

 After all the stuff of buildings endurance will gain our souls. Well, having walked the Heaphy track last weekend, it was an exercise in endurance, uphill late in the day on day one, fighting the waning light, but we made it. Day two , incessant rain , wet feet and no view but the red tussock, but the mosses and lichens were magical.An opportunity to testify to a sense of shared understanding as my daughter said,”This must be wonderful for you mum as you see the beauty of God’s creation .” What a moment that was! ”For I will give you words of wisdom” And there we were – a moment of presence in the downpour and then one foot in front of the other, many of you know about endurance, when it is just a muddy trudge from one day to the next. Then we had the giant snails and the takahe.

 **Endurance**

to have the very physical elements as in a great walk but also openness to the wisdom of what is put on our lips and how our open hearts can surprise us. This for me is the soul moment-

So why do we endure here as Christians when others have chosen other paths ?

What meaning remains as some think us outmoded, the mystery of the sacrament reduced to basic food and drink, without the immanence of God the real presence , sometimes felt but not ever quite understood. Why do we come here, what makes us endure through the weeks and days of doubt and tiredness?

Consider this

 Poem .In Church by RS Thomas

**Often I try**

**To analyse the quality**

**Of its silences.**

**Is this where God hides**

**From my searching?**

**I have stopped to listen,**

**After the few people have gone,**

**To the air recomposing itself**

**For vigil. It has waited like this**

**Since the stones grouped themselves about it.**

**These are the hard ribs**

**Of a body that our prayers have failed**

**To animate. Shadows advance**

**From their corners to take possession**

**Of places the light held**

**For an hour. The bats resume**

**Their business. The uneasiness of the pews**

**Ceases. There is no other sound**

**In the darkness but the sound of a man**

**Breathing, testing his faith**

**On emptiness, nailing his questions**

**One by one to an untenanted cross.**

**Kay**

1. Working Preacher , Emerson Powery; [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Feasting on the Word [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Feasting on the Word [↑](#footnote-ref-3)