



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – 26th Sunday in Pentecost – November 18, 2018

I remember very well sitting under a tree on the slopes of the Mount of Olives and looking out at the Temple of Jerusalem that Jesus talks about this morning, the temple that once was the magnificent structure that it was 2000 years ago and that's now in ruins, although the walls are still intact. As I sat and gazed upon its ruins, I wondered and imagined not only what that temple must've looked like, but also what kinds of things can happen to buildings like that in 2000 years.

This Cathedral, for example, has been here for 151 years. What will it look like in 2000? Will it even exist? And if it doesn't, what does that say about our foundational beliefs? If the Cathedral were to crumble to the ground like the Temple of Jerusalem did, would that in anyway undermine our relationship with God, or our desire to feel God's presence, or our longing to worship God?

We live in a world after all where typhoons come and obliterate things, where tsunamis wipe out entire towns and villages, and where airplanes fly into buildings and bring them down to the ground like they did on September 11th, 2001.

We hope that towering structures will stand forever and that ocean beds will always stay secure and in their place, but we know that that's not the way things work. We know that these things aren't stable and that they can't last forever, and then we ask, "Well then, what can?" And we know the answer to that. We know the answer to that question is the presence of God and God's abiding love for us and for the world God created. That will last forever.

Let's bear that in mind when we hear the words of Jesus, the words of Jesus that say:

Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Jesus says these words as he and his disciples are leaving the Temple and they notice how large the stones are that create it and how they seem like they will stand forever. And then Jesus startles them by telling them that no, that's not true, that one day the stones will crumble and the temple will fall.

And he's not saying so much that they have to worry about wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes and famines, but more not to worry about them and that those who speak in his name want us to focus all of our time and energy on the end of the age rather than having us focus on what needs to be done for the gospel of Jesus right here and right now, today, here in the present time. That's what we need to focus on. We can't control the other things, we can't control those outcomes, but we can control the here and now and what we do and who we are. We can definitely control that.

26th Sunday in Pentecost – November 18, 2018, cont'd.

Who are we in this moment? I know that we love God. But how do we love God? How do we worship God? How do we feel God's presence? How do we make that presence and that love known to the world that may not have knowledge of that love, but that only feels the effects of typhoons, tsunamis, and buildings crumbling to the ground after airplanes fly into them?

In the midst of those challenges, how do we love our neighbors as ourselves? How do we do that, love our neighbor, when we turn on the TV set and see refugees making their way north toward our borders only to be confronted by military troops, or see parents separated from their children when they arrive at those borders, or having white supremacy marches in American streets in this presentation age (in the here and now), or when our laws make it possible for someone to go in to a high school and kill 17 students and teachers, or shoot up synagogues because they don't like the way people worship, or go into bars and kill patrons because we haven't helped them deal with the effects of coming home from war?

I know that these kinds of questions are very difficult to grapple with and that they make us uncomfortable—maybe the same way Jesus made the rulers and insiders of his time uncomfortable by questioning the logic behind what they were doing and why they were doing it. Instead of thinking about that, maybe it's actually easier to think about the end times and wars and rumors of wars and famines and earthquakes. Maybe that's actually less scary, because it's farther away from us than the here and now. But we are people of faith; and our worship and our prayers and our sacraments are supposed to empower and embolden us to dare to strive for success at being good, at being kind, at being compassionate, and at being loving people. Our churches, after all, are meant to serve as containers for liberation and peace; not as containers that imprison us in walls of impossibility and fear.

We're talking a lot about stewardship right now and I would like to submit to you that we are stewards not only of this building, and this organ, and the stained glass windows, and the roof and the air-conditioners that we want and the sound system we going to get; but more than that, we are also stewards of the Cathedral's mission and ministry of the cause to be good and loving people in the here and now – never mind what's going to happen at the end times, but in the here and now.

So, pray. So, worship. So, take the sacraments. And use that to solidify the community to be people who are agents of the gospel and of God's love so that the church is indeed a container for liberation and peace. And while we need a container for liberation and peace in the form of this beautiful, magnificent Cathedral building, we know that it will crumble and fall to the ground one day. It's inevitable. The stained glass will disappear. The fountain will stop working. The organ will meet its end. When? We don't know. But what we do know is that the mission and ministry to be agents of the gospel and of God's love will never end; and when we really come to that realization, we need not fear the building's crumbling at the end of the age, but we can embrace it because our mission will be accomplished, and we will have created a world worthy of the second coming of Christ.

And for now? Be good stewards. Be good stewards of the building and grounds. Be good stewards of the money. But don't stop there. Be also good stewards of God's creation and of God's call to us to love and serve the Lord by seeking and serving Christ in all persons, by respecting the dignity of every human being, by being agents of the gospel, and by being deliverers of the Good News of God's love through your thoughts, through your words, and through your deeds. And most of all,

26th Sunday in Pentecost – November 18, 2018, cont'd.

embrace the end of the age, for then we know that our mission will be accomplished and that we can fully embrace the presence of our loving God.

Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Amen.