

Stewardship Sermon for Nov. 14, 2010
24PENT (PR 28)
Luke 21:5-19 “Fear, Faith & the Future”

Last week Pastor Rismiller preached on the text from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. He talked about the blessing of God in Christ and how good it is to hear this blessing pronounced to us each Sunday in worship. Well today is a stewardship Sunday. We don’t often make the connection between God’s blessing and our stewardship. That is because our eyes naturally focus on the gift rather than the giver. But it is God who stands behind every good gift and blessing of life and God calls us to be good stewards of those gifts and blessings. Stewardship is often seen only in light of what we do with money. But stewardship involves all of life and how we use the many and varied gifts of God. More on that later in the sermon.

The text for today is about the end of the world. When we think about the end of the world we often think in terms of trauma, turmoil and trouble. The end of days is a favorite theme of movies because it creates fear in us, the fear of suffering, the fear of the unknown, the fear of losing life. And in the movies the hero is the one who fights against the evil powers that threaten life on the earth. The hero risks everything in order to defeat the evil powers that would destroy the earth. There is a connection between our fear of the end of days and what God has promised us. We find it in the text for today. This text isn’t intended to scare you about the end of time. It is intended to encourage you to faith and trust in God for today and for tomorrow.

Luke wrote at a time when Xians had a right to be frightened about the future. The Roman Emperor, Domitian was persecuting Christians to the point of extinction. The first century Xians looked for the imminent return of Jesus in glory. They wanted desperately for Jesus to come quickly and rescue them. So Luke wrote, not to inflame the imaginations of believers about the end of the world but to fan into a blazing fire the smoldering wick of faith in the early church which was undergoing persecution. If you know that Jesus is The One who holds the future it makes you less afraid of the future. Look at vs. 12-17. (read text). These words of Jesus are scary at first but then in vs. 18 Jesus says... **“But not a hair of your head will perish.”** This is a powerful word of encouragement and hope. You can trust in God for your future. It gave early Xians confidence. It does the same for us.

Even though **“they will arrest you”** – God will be with you.

Even though **“they will hand you over to the authorities”** - God will lift you up.

Even though **“you will be brought before kings and governors”** – God will give you words to speak.

Even though **“you will be betrayed”** – God will never forsake you.

Even though **“you perish”** -- God will give you life.

These words are good news!

God will be with you.

God will lift you up.

Do not worry.

God will give you words to speak.

God will never forsake you.

God will give you life.

This text encouraged the early Xians and it encourages you today to trust in God. Luke says that there is work to do here on earth while we WAIT for God to bring in his kingdom. You are NOT TO WORRY about God's timetable. You are called to step into the future in faith, not fear, always giving thanks for the blessings of God and the promise that God is with you.

As you look to the future in confident faith and trust in God, it is helpful to also remember the past and to note the blessings God has bestowed on you in the past. You can see that in your own life as you look back and see the blessings of God in your life. You can also look to the scriptures for examples of God's blessing.

In the O.T. we read about the Israelites who escaped from slavery in Egypt to an uncertain future. As they settled in the Promised Land they struggled with the temptation to think that this glorious new land BELONGED to them and that they DESERVED living in a land of milk and honey. That temptation is still around today.

But Moses warned them, in Deut. 8:17 “Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." 18 But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth...”

The Israelites soon forgot the difficulties their ancestors faced in the 40 years in the desert. It is easy to forget the grace of God which sustains you even today. It is a strong temptation to become smug in ones

blessings...and to say “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” “I can guarantee my future without God.”

How should you approach the future? Listen to the text for today. It calls you to approach the future with confident faith not fearful anxiety.

Confident faith makes you eager to get up in the morning and engage in the activities and challenges of the day. Confident faith enables you to look outside your narrow self-protective interests to look for opportunities to serve others. And that leads to the stewardship part of this sermon....

I am constantly amazed at how generous this congregation is with its time and talent. There are many members who give hours and hours of their time to help here at Zion. From Sunday School teachers who pass on the faith to our children to those who work to enhance our worship or work on building and grounds...the dedication is amazing. I thank you for your generous spirit and willingness to give your time. We could not do all that we do here without volunteers. Having said that, it is important to note that the church, like most volunteer organizations, operates on the 80-20 rule. That is, 80% of the work gets done by 20% of the people. To those of you in the 20% I say a special “Thank You” for your dedication. It is easy to get burned-out in doing so much. Burn out comes from being overworked and under appreciated. It arises from taking on too many responsibilities with too little help from others. It is easy for the congregation to take advantage of its best volunteers. It is also wrong. For those of you who feel worn out, tired of doing so much, giving so generously of your time I say, “Slow down. Take a break. Ask others to help you with a project. Remember that you don’t have to do it all yourself and that working together enables you to be a

mentor to other volunteers. And my prayer for you is this: That God would give you His power and grace that will fill your life with joy in giving. And that God would renew your strength for serving and bless you with the satisfaction that comes from using your time and talents for the kingdom's work.”

At this time of the year we ask all our members to make a pledge to support our work together here at Zion. It is one way of giving thanks to God for the blessings we have received. We are a richly blessed congregation. By sharing a portion of our blessings we can be a blessing to others. Have you ever thought of the offering during worship as an act of thanksgiving? It is. You are saying “Thank you” to God for the many blessings you have received.

We will soon celebrate Thanksgiving. For Xians, Thanksgiving is NOT just one day a year. “Thanksgiving” is part of our everyday lives and is also part of our worship. Thanks-giving, or Giving Thanks, is our response to God who has first given us everything we have and call our own. It is important for us to look back and see the on-going provision of God for us in the past year. God has taken care of us and we can count on His provision for our future. Faith holds on to this faithfulness of God, unafraid of the future, confident in the promises of God.

And so give thanks that God holds your life, your family, your church and your future in His hands. Give thanks that God promises to be with you each day, thru the ups and downs of life, the good times and the bad. Give

thanks for opportunities to worship God and to offer gifts of your time, talent and treasure for the up building of our church, to the glory of God.

Let us pray. Our gracious and generous God, we give you thanks for the blessings you shower upon us. Thank you for the gift of life, for work to do and health to do it. Thank you for the gift of family and friends who surround us with care and love. Thank you for your church in which we learn of your great love for us in Jesus. Lord help us to treasure our church and to support it with eagerness and joy. Help us to use our time, talent and treasure to build up your kingdom on earth. Thank you for blessing us with this important work as we wait for the coming of your Kingdom. In Jesus name we pray. AMEN