

STANDING FIRM WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGES

The gospel story today from Luke is not a feel good, happy story. In the story, Jesus tells the disciples that are admiring this beautiful temple, looking around at the beautiful glass, the beautiful gold; everything is great and Jesus is, in modern words, a sort of Debbie Downer. He says "This is all going to collapse. Everything you see will fall and..." "Wow, we were just admiring the building Jesus and then you have to tell us that all this is going to collapse?" And if that's not bad enough, Jesus goes even further and says "And you will be tried and some of you will face death and a period of destruction and change is coming in your lives unlike anything you can imagine." So quite a dramatic story, not the sort of uplifting, happy story that we kind of like to watch at the movies but a story of great change. He ends the story by saying but do not worry for God is with you in all of this and I will be with you in all of this.

So this story is read at two levels like most stories you'll see; a very literal level and for us in our tradition, I think we're fortunate to have to look at it at the spiritual or deeper level. I'm glad we have both. At the literal level, this story was seen as Jesus predicting the destruction of the temple which did happen about 40 years after this prophecy. So 40 years after this moment where Jesus is with the disciples, the temple is completely crushed. Why? Because the Jewish people rebelled against Rome, they thought they could kick Rome out of Israel in about 66 AD and Rome said "Not going to happen and in fact when we crush you this time we're really going to crush you and we're going to crush the holiest place that you have, the place where your God sits — in the temple." And so the temple was destroyed in about 70 AD. So at the very literal level, it's Jesus giving a prophecy

and telling what the future is going to be and telling people "Stick through it" and that's interesting at the figurative level but I think at the spiritual level, the deeper level of what the images are, are much richer and very relevant. At the spiritual level, Jesus is basically saying, "This temple that you're in, this place where God sits, that period of worshiping God is ending. God is now going to be with you presently through me, Christ. We're coming into a new spiritual period and when that happens there is all sorts of destruction. Institutions that we knew and loved are gone. The way things were passes away and we're coming into a whole new period and it will be tumultuous and the good news is I will be there with you." What a perfect text for this week in our nation's capital. A time when people are literally describing a political earthquake as taking place. There is wars and rumors of wars and a campaign that was fought almost like a battle and described as a battle and there is tumult. What you expected didn't happen and people are very surprised and very upset.

This past week, it all started on election night really, as I watched on Facebook my friends from both sides of the aisle. One side in complete despair another side shocked and happy and I saw these two completely different worlds, two completely different countries and then the rest of the week I was fielding calls from the thousands of people — I didn't get thousands of calls but there's thousands of people who will lose their jobs or have to find a new school, or have to get a new home. And it's not just that they didn't know that's the deal when you work in politics but it was a shock. So they were surprised and when there is surprise, there is great anguish. So people are literally depressed, the temple has been destroyed. The way I was expecting didn't happen. We are in a uncharted territory so lots of sadness and I had an unusual week in the last week we did that service of unity and healing with other groups and we had, I think 11,000

subscribers on Facebook watched the service and I brought my godson up to talk about how he was anxious. Children were anxious, adults were anxious and you could feel it all week. I left there and joined the National Council of Churches in South Carolina. We met in Charleston at Mother Emmanuel Church. Mother Emmanuel Church is the church that had the horrible racist killing just over a year ago and we worshipped together in that space. It was an African-American church and they talked about their anxiety about the election. What did it mean? They were worried and then as faith would have it I was in Mexico this week, a long planned trip. Can you imagine being in Mexico this week? The one thing they want to talk about was their anxiety. They were upset that people on staff and companies — so it's a ripple effect. All over the world, so I was in Mexico talking about this. So we're coming into a period of what you might call the new normal, 'tumultuousness'. Things are upending, old institutions that we use to rely on are not serving the same way and we're in a new period and I think it is a wonderful opportunity for new spiritual leadership to rise in this moment. The old institutions that aren't serving are going to need to evolve including this church. As we're looking at our future we need to evolve to meet the needs because the spiritual needs will only increase in periods where there is chaos and confusion and what I thought I knew, I don't. Three quick things I think that we could be doing as spiritual leaders in this time, taken from the text and the first is that Jesus prophesied, he told a different story and I think we need a different story.

The story right now in our culture is "I'm good, they're evil and I must destroy them," and it's infected our politics and our politics have infected our churches so that people are just in warring sides. "I'm good, their bad we must destroy the other side and if I lose I'll fight another day" and the war goes on. As spiritual people, followers of Jesus we know that we are all one, we are all children of God we are

not all good or all evil; we all have evil within ourselves on our side and good on our side and we need to learn to find Christ in each other, particularly when we disagree. So we need to be prophetic, and prophetic sometimes can be awkward but the prophecy I think is that we are one; we're not one good and one evil. The other thing I think that we could learn in this period or we could teach in this period as spiritual leaders is moral courage. Moral courage, I believe means that as Christians we stand in solidarity with the voice that is not being heard. This election has been a lot of talk that the voice that wasn't being heard were people in the Rust Belt. Generally, the stereotype is poor, white men who didn't feel heard and so for that I'm glad they feel heard, personally. And then this week as I said, getting calls from friends who are immigrants, friends who are Muslims, our job is to stand in solidarity with them as well. It is not hitting one against the other, or arguing which side is right. It's when people don't have a voice, we can stand with them as a voice in this very difficult time and just give them love and protection of their fears. That's our job as Christians and then finally we come to, I think the third lesson of this period and it's the conclusion of the gospel where Jesus says "You may face death but don't worry, nothing will happen to you." It's a very different way of looking at it. Most people would say death is the worst thing that could happen. But we don't see the story that way. We see that we are developing our spiritual soul and that what we have in these tumultuous times is we can trust in God, not in political parties, not in nationhoods, not in consumer goods that we purchase, not in the data but in God. We can believe in God and trust in God and stand in God and know the world can move and these can be tumultuous times. God stands firm and we stand on that foundation and we can know trust. Trust is the toughest when the narrative that we've been thought has been disrupted.

A friend called me late last night who I haven't talked to for many years. And the person he loves most in the world had a sudden death and he said "It's not fair. That's what I can't get over. I'm even thinking of possibly, maybe ending my own life because it's not fair." We talked about trusting, that's when trust in God is most important, when you can't see the way out of it. Trusting when it doesn't seem to make sense. Trusting that we were never promised to live eternal lives on this planet, that we are spiritual beings in a physical world. It's a different narrative than the one that's being taught. So there is an important role for a new spiritual awakening in this country and in this world, one that can prophesy a different story of oneness, that we are all one and we are connected and we can put to death the lie that we are good and they are evil and we must destroy them. We can be morally courageous in this period where we stand with whichever group feels it doesn't have a voice. The weakest group is the group we must stand with and finally we can trust in God that God loves us and only through that love do we have the power to play this important role at this important time. Here we are at Church of the Holy City in our nation's capital with the unique understanding of what it means that a new heaven and a new earth is coming into being. We have an important role in this space, I believe and I believe that's coming into being and I look forward to stepping into that role in this very tumultuous time so that we can find peace in the midst of this confusion. Amen.