

**Sermon for November 16, 2013**  
**Luke 21:-19**

Although these words of Jesus are spoken as if they were to be future events; for those of Luke's community they have already happened or are happening now. The followers of Jesus are no longer allowed to worship in the Temple. Many have been turned into the Jewish Temple authorities by family and friends because they believe Jesus to be the Son of God. If they don't recant their beliefs they are turned over to Pharisees like Saul who stone them to death.

But it doesn't stop there. Because they are no longer part of the Jewish faith; they are no longer protected from professing the Roman religion—that Caesar is one of many gods. To not profess this belief means death; usually by crucifixion as an insurgent. To avoid this fate all one had to do was to profess Caesar as Lord, but many Christians could not do this because they had only one Lord—Jesus Christ. And so we have stories about early Christians who were burned at the stake or who were tossed into the arena to fight gladiators or wild animals for the entertainment of the Roman citizens who watched. This is where the English meaning for the word martyr comes from—those who witnessed to their faith by the giving of their lives.

The Temple has been destroyed by the Roman military—burned to the ground as punishment for the Jewish revolt. Mount Vesuvius has erupted shaking the earth and throwing great signs into the skies. Luke's community must have been wondering what in the world was going on! Is this the end that was foretold?

As we here today can attest—it wasn't, but because of these events Christianity was spread throughout the world. As it became less and less safe to live in Jerusalem; many Christians traveled further and further away from the city. Eventually they would travel beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire itself. But it just wasn't the words of these believers that led others to Christ—it was their actions.

When the Christians were brought before Caesar and would not renounce their faith—even when faced with the most horrible of deaths—it had a profound impact on those watching. When plagues would destroy entire towns it was the Christians who risked their own lives to take care of the sick and dying and to bury the dead. When Roman families would leave unwanted infants out in the elements to die; it was the Christians who took them in and raised them. What they said was backed up by what they did—and people were watching.

But what does this mean for us today? We aren't persecuted for our faith; at least not here. We aren't put to death for stating our belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We aren't turned in by family and friends to the government for our faith. But there are times of conflict in our families and in our church. What does the world see as we resolve these conflicts? When we are presented with incurable diseases, deaths of loved ones, economic setbacks; what does the world see? When natural disasters strike what response does the world see?

Does it see bitter fighting and separations? Does it see someone so consumed with fear and dread that they can't function? Do they see people who turn their backs on the other and claim that this is their punishment from God?

Or do they see people who listen to each other with love and respect knowing that we won't always agree on everything, but that's ok because the other is an important brother or sister in Christ. Do they see people who know that whatever happens to them that God is with them and there is a better place waiting for them? Do they see people who know that they are God's hands in this world and the best way to turn people to Christ is to see Christ in them and to be Christ to them?

The world is still watching. Are we showing it a God whose love shows up in the most unexpected of places—in a dirty manger, in the weathered hands of a carpenter, in the horrific death on a cross? Because this God is the only one who joins us in the muck of our lives and makes sure that we get to the other side without losing one hair from our heads.

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