



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

A Sermon for the Tenth Sunday After Trinity

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 &
St. Luke 19:41-47

Fr. William Klock

August 4, 2024

Imagine being in the crowds that surrounded Jesus as he made his way through the towns and cities to Jerusalem for the last time. By now, everyone knew who he was—or, at any rate, who he claimed to be. There were sceptics. There were believers. A lot of people weren't sure what to believe. He wasn't what people expect of the Messiah, but he *was* doing Messiah things. He was healing the sick and the blind and the lame. He cast out demons. He raised the dead. He preached good news to the poor. Think of the crowds in Jericho, the last city before Jesus climbed the mountain to Jerusalem. The crowds swarmed the road to see him, he'd healed blind Bartimaeus, and that thing with Zacchaeus! That little twerp had spent his traitorous life selling out to the Romans and ripping everyone off, but since he'd met Jesus he was a new man—even paying everyone back what he'd stolen. Everywhere that Jesus went, the promises of the Prophets of old were finally being fulfilled. Despite all the questions people had about him, there was definitely something about Jesus. That, and Passover was just days away. Jesus plus Jerusalem plus Passover! Surely something big was about to happen! Maybe the day of the Lord really was just around the corner and that got *everyone* out and lining the road as Jesus came through town.

And then, on his way out of town, Jesus stopped and looked around. The crowd went silent. He was about to say something. “There was once a

nobleman,” Jesus said, “who went to a far country to be given royal authority and then return. He summoned ten of his slaves and gave them ten silver coins. ‘Do business with these,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’ His subjects, however, hated him, and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don't want this man to be our king.’

“So it happened that when he received the kingship and came back again, he gave orders to summon these slaves who had received the money, so that he could find out how they had got on with their business efforts. The first came forward and said, ‘Master, your money has made ten times its value!’”

“ ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’” he said. ‘You've been faithful with something small; now you can take command of ten cities.’

“The second came and said, ‘Master, your money has made five times its value!’

“ ‘You too—you can take charge of five cities.’

“The other came and said, ‘Master, here is your money. I kept it safe, hidden away in this handkerchief. I was afraid of you, knowing that you are a hard man. You profit where you made no investment and you harvest where you did not sow.’

“ ‘I'll condemn you out of your own mouth, you wicked servant! You knew that I'm a hard man, profiting where I haven't invested and harvesting where I haven't sown, so why didn't you at least put my money in the bank? Then, at least, I'd have earned some interest when I got back!’”

“ ‘Take the money from him,’ he said to the bystanders, ‘and give it to the man who turned my one coin into ten!’ (‘Master,’ they said to him, ‘he's got ten coins already!’)

And then paused and he looked around at the crowd and his face was sombre

and the people could tell, he wasn't just telling a story anymore. Now he was the king from the story talking directly to them

“ ‘Let me be clear,’ he said, “To everyone who has will be given more; but if someone has nothing, even what he has will be taken away from him. But as for these enemies of mine, who didn't want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in front of me.”

And with that, Luke says that Jesus went on his way, setting out on that winding road up to Jerusalem. No further interactions with the crowd. No further commentary. Did the people understand? I think they must have. Of course, the problem was—as so often seems to be the case—everyone was pointing fingers at everyone else. Jesus the Messiah had come to judge—to bring God's justice—but it was the other guys who were the problem. The Pharisees looked down on everyone who wasn't a Pharisee. The Essenes looked down on everyone who wasn't an Essene. The *am ha'artez*—the regular Joes—they looked down in return on those other folks because they were always looking down on everyone else. And the Sadducees? Pfft. Judgement. It'll never happen—just like the resurrection of the dead will never happen. But everyone understood what Jesus was saying. He was the king finally coming back to see what his servants have been up to in his absence. The crowds already saw Jesus as part of the story of Israel. If he was the Messiah, then he was the rightful king returning to Zion to take his throne—just like the king in the parable. And that—if Jesus really was the Messiah—that meant the day of the Lord—the day when God would judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous—that meant it was coming—almost here—just like in the parable.

So this was the day the prophets had spoken of. The Jewish exiles had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon

hundreds of years before, they'd rebuilt the city and the temple, but the Lord's presence had never returned. The temple, as glorious as it was—especially after Solomon's recent renovations—the temple sat empty. The priests went about their business of offerings and sacrifices, but the cloud of glory that had once rested on the ark of the covenant, the presence of the God of Israel, had never returned and, because of that, the people questioned whether their exile had really ever ended. They were back in the promised land, but the most important part of the promised land—the presence of the Lord—was still missing. The prophet Malachi had announced that the “the Lord whom you seek” would come to the temple, but that he would come in fiery judgement. Zechariah, too, spoke of the Lord, one day, finally, returning to Zion. Again, everyone would have understood Jesus' story. He was saying that in him, the Lord was finally returning to Jerusalem as he had promised through the Prophets. And Jesus has left them with that big question: Who will stand before the Lord's judgement.

And the part of the story about the talents entrusted to the servants made perfect sense to the people. That was them. They knew that the Lord had given them a purpose. They knew that the Lord had called Abraham, that he had delivered their ancestors from Pharaoh's bondage, that he had led them to the promised land to be a light in the midst of the nations—a witness to what it looks like to be the people who live with the Creator God in their midst. They knew that their ancestors had gone off into exile in judgement for their faithlessness and idolatry. And that judgement still hung over them. The people of Israel were called to be stewards of God's covenant, his law, his grace and when he returned he would judge them. Had they been faithful stewards? All along the way, as Jesus made his way from Galilee to Jerusalem, he was warning the people that if they did not listen to him, if

they did not repent, if they continued to treat the Lord's covenant with disdain, the Lord's judgement would fall on them: on the nation, on Jerusalem, and especially on the temple. Jesus is saying that in him, the God of Israel is coming and on that day of judgement, you don't want to be that faithless servant who has been a poor steward of God's grace and hidden away his master's treasure in a handkerchief.

Jesus reminds the people that God's kingdom was about to come and that as much as it was good news for many, it also meant horrible judgement for a lot of them. Some of the crowd cheered, some wept happy tears, but there were some—the people invested in the status quo, the people with their own firmly entrenched ideas of what the Messiah would be like and how the Lord's return was supposed to go down—there were some who were angry. Like those in the parable, they didn't want this man to be their king. They couldn't bear the thought that somehow this Jesus was actually the Messiah, let alone the Lord, the God of Israel returned to Zion.

And I expect that parable raced ahead of Jesus, up the long and winding road from Jericho to Jerusalem—passed from mouth to mouth down the long line of pilgrims on their way to Passover. The parable prepared the way for Jesus to enter Jerusalem. Luke leaves out the long and tiring journey up the road from Jericho—the road where we meet the Good Samaritan in another of Jesus' stories. From Jericho Luke takes us straight to the top of the mountains, to Bethany, as Jesus sends his friends to find the prophesied donkey. (That's the Palm Sunday Gospel we know so well.) As Jesus rode through the crowd into Jerusalem, the people cheered him and sang messianic chants. They knew what was happening. The Lord was returning to Zion. But just like at Jericho, there were those who were angry. How dare Jesus do this! And Jesus knew, despite the crowds who

welcomed him, Jesus knew that judgement was inevitable. The Pharisees were sure to remind him. There he was, riding through the crowd to their messianic chants and the Pharisees pushed their way through and they said, “Rabbi, tell your disciples to cut it out.” As far as they were concerned, this was blasphemy. Jesus wasn't the Messiah, let alone the Lord returning to his people. That, at this kingly display was probably going to cause problems with the Romans. And with their rebuke ringing in his ears, Luke says in verse 41, that as Jerusalem came into view, Jesus stopped and wept.

“If only you'd known this day—even you,” Jesus said, “the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days are coming upon you, when your enemies will build up earthworks around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and bring you crashing down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone on another, because you did not know the moment when God was visiting you.”

Jesus' tears remind us what's at the heart of the gospel. For three years, Jesus had warned the people of Galilee that judgement was coming to the nation, to Jerusalem, and to the temple. Over and over he called his people to repent. His message hadn't gone over any better than it had for the prophets of old, like Jeremiah, who was known for the tears he wept over his people. Jerusalem would be no different than Galilee and Jesus knew it. He'd been rejected there—they even tried to stone him once. His reception in Jerusalem was going to be even worse. And as much as he knew rejection meant his own death, that's not why he wept. He wept for their sake. “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish,” he had said a few chapters earlier. And now he looks across the valley to Jerusalem where

Pilate had just recently killed a bunch of Galileans and where the tower of Siloam had fallen, crushing people alive, and it was all just a foretaste of another, greater catastrophe soon to come. A few decades later and the hills around the city would be covered with Roman crosses, bearing executed Jews and the city and the temple would be brought crumbling down.

The people had heard the warning, but they would not listen and Jesus wept. Again, not for himself or for his own coming death. And not with any sense of, “I told you so!” Jesus wept, because discipline and justice do not come from the cold heart of a distant God, but from the God who loves so deeply that he was willing to give his own life to summon his beloved to repentance, from a love that is faithful and that *will* set things to rights, in order to bring what’s best. A love that wept over a rebellious people intent on their own agendas and their own interests, who refused to be stewards of his goodness and grace.

And the temple—the temple was at the heart of it all. There’s a reason why Jesus went straight to the temple when he entered Jerusalem. That was what the Messiah was supposed to do. And so Luke goes on in verses 45-48:

He went into the temple and began to throw out the traders, saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”

And he was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men of the people were trying to destroy him. They couldn’t find any way to do it, because all the people were hanging on his words.

If all we take away from this is that it was Jesus’ angry protest of the commercialisation of the temple, we’ll have missed the point. This is another of his acted-out prophecies. It’s a warning—in the vein of Jeremiah—that if the temple becomes the hide-out

of a bunch of robbers, it will fall under the Lord’s judgement. And, of course, that’s just what had happened. But the robbers weren’t necessarily who we might at first think. The money-changers and the folks selling animals for sacrifice had to be there. Roman coinage wasn’t allowed in the temple. People needed animals for their sacrifices and not everyone could bring one from home. Maybe the exchange rates and the prices were gouging the people, but the *real* robbers were the priests and leaders of Israel, who were robbing God in far more important ways.

The temple stood at the heart of Jewish identity. It represented the covenant between the Lord and his people. And even though the cloud of his glory had never returned to it after the exile, it was still seen as that one place on earth where heaven and earth, where God and human beings met. And so it was the symbol of the Lord’s faithfulness to Israel, of the sureness of his covenant promises. But in return the leaders of Israel used the temple to put on a show of faithfulness. The overt idolatry, the altars to Baal and Asherah that sent Israel into exile were long gone, but the leaders of Israel had found other ways to be unfaithful to the Lord. They lived as if a mere outward façade of faithfulness would bring his blessings and Jesus has been reminding them over and over and over, that the only real response to the Lord’s covenant faithfulness is faithfulness and obedience in return. Disobedience to the Lord’s covenant doesn’t just result in a lack of blessing. No, if you’re in covenant with the Lord, disobedience eventually calls down judgement. The Lord will set this world to rights and if the people he has called to be stewards of his grace for the sake of the world will not be true to their calling, he will remove them from that stewardship and give it to another—just as in the parable. The leaders of Israel had done nothing with their talent but bury it in the ground. Soon it would be time to take it and

give it to another.

Again, this wasn’t unexpected. Throughout his ministry Jesus had pointed—sometimes subtly and other times not-so-subtly—to the fact that the temple’s days were numbered and that, in him, the Lord was doing something new. Maybe the greatest hints were those times when he announced the forgiveness of sins, without people having to go to the trouble of offering a sacrifice. Repeatedly, Jesus bypassed the priests and the temple and offered, himself, what the temple had offered the people. Later, he would announce that he would tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days. All of this was blasphemy to the priests and to the scribes and the Pharisees. And they never did grasp what he meant when he said he would rebuild the temple in three days, but those who saw him raised from the dead did. Jesus was the new temple. Heaven and earth, God and man no longer meeting in a building on the mountaintop, but now meeting in Jesus himself. In him we meet the God of Israel. In him we know his justice, but in him we also know his grace and his mercy and his love as he weeps for those about to face God’s wrath, as he prays for the very people who crucified him. In him, most of all, we see the profound faithfulness of God and his worthiness to receive glory and praise.

And then the amazing thing. As the Lord judged the old Israel for her unfaithfulness to her calling, in Jesus he creates a new people, a new Israel, and establishes a new covenant—a covenant this time ratified with his blood shed at the cross and in the pouring out of his own Spirit on his people. We go from Jesus, in whom God and man, heaven and earth intersect, to his church—to a people—in whom the Lord himself dwells. The old Israel looked to a law written on stone tablets, while the new—while we—live with the law written by the Spirit of God on our own hearts. And in the same way, the old Israel looked

to a temple of bricks and mortar on the mountaintop above Jerusalem, but by his Spirit, Jesus has made us the new temple. He incorporates us into his ministry. As we saw a couple of weeks ago. We have been adopted we share in his inheritance. And so, because our Lord is prophet, priest, and king, we too as a people share in his prophetic, priestly, and ruling ministry.

In our Epistle today, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, St. Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth of their calling—of the riches the Lord had entrusted to them. The Spirit had empowered them with amazing gifts, but like the old Israel, they'd forgotten their calling and were using those gifts for their own agendas—again, burying the king's wealth in the ground—turning the Lord's temple into a den of robbers. Paul writes:

There are different types of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are different kinds of service, but the same Lord; and there are different types of activities, but it is the same God who operates them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

This leads Paul into Chapter 13, where he writes about the nature and supremacy of love. "Love never ends," he says. These other gifts are temporary, but they're meant to build up love. They're meant to create a community of people who will be stewards of God's grace—a community of people redeemed and made new by his own blood, shed at the cross, a people who, by his grace, have a share in his new creation, a priestly and prophetic people called to go out as the Messiah's royal heralds to proclaim that he has died, that he has risen, and that he is the world's true Lord. A people who live with the Lord in their midst and who show the world his faithfulness, to show the world that he is worthy of glory and

praise.

Brothers and Sisters, that's us. Like Israel in Jesus's day, we live in an in-between time. One day the Lord will return again to judge the earth, when the gospel has done its work, when every last one of his enemies has been put under his feet, when he comes to remove every last vestige of sin and rebellion and to set everything to rights, to wipe away every tear, and bring his new creation in all its fullness. But in anticipation of that day, we are his stewards, empowered by his Spirit and entrusted with the gospel, with the good news about Jesus, crucified and risen.

And as Christendom wanes—at least in our part of the world—and as the darkness creeps back in, there's a powerful sense in which we, the church, are coming to know exile as the old Israel once did. Brothers and Sisters, that exile is a call to faithfulness, a call to remember that Jesus is king, and call to remember that his gospel and his Spirit will accomplish what he's sent them to do. And that means that as stewards of his gospel and his Spirit, *we will* accomplish what he has chosen and called us to do—to be stewards of his grace, to be his royal heralds proclaiming his death and resurrection and his lordship until he comes again. No matter how dark it gets, no matter how hated and despised we may be, the Lord is always faithful to his promises. He is our hope and he never fails. May we be faithful with the treasures of the gospel and the Spirit he has entrusted to us, that one day he may say, "Well done, good and faithful servants."

Let's pray: Let your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of your humble servants; and, that we may obtain what we ask of you, teach us to ask for those things that please you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*