



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity: The Time of Your Visitation

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 &

St. Matthew 19:41-47

Fr. William Klock

August 13, 2023

It is providential that we celebrated the Transfiguration of Jesus last Sunday, because last Sunday's gospel prepares us for today's. The Transfiguration was the turning point in Jesus' ministry: he'd finished his work in Galilee; it was time to turn south for that final journey to Jerusalem. And Peter's confession, "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God", it was that confession that pointed him to Jerusalem. The Messiah couldn't stay in the provinces forever. Eventually he had to go to Jerusalem: to deal with the Romans, to cleanse the temple, and ultimately to take his throne. Of course, Jesus' understanding of what that meant was very different from what pretty much everyone else expected. But, still, it was time to go to Jerusalem.

And now today's Gospel, beginning at Luke 19:41, see's Jesus arriving—on the Mount of Olives, looking across the valley at the city with its great temple perched on the mountain peak above. But before we get there, I want to back up to the middle of Luke 19. Jesus' last stop before he made his way up that long, winding, and sometimes dangerous road to Jerusalem was in Jericho. That's where he healed blind Bartimaeus. That's where he met Zacchaeus, the wee little tax collector who climbed a tree to get a glimpse of the Messiah. People were excited. The crowds grew bigger in every city they passed through. Everyone knew about Jesus. Everyone knew something big was afoot. And everyone knew that because everyone was saying that

Jesus was the Messiah and because he was so obviously heading to Jerusalem—and the fact that it was almost Passover just added to the suspense. Whether they believed all the Messiah talk, Jesus had been doing and saying Messiah-like things and the most Messiah-like thing of all that he could do is to march into Jerusalem to confront the priests and the rulers and to set things straight—and to do it at Passover. Some people in the crowd were excited. They believed. The Day of the Lord was finally just around the corner and Jesus was going to go to Jerusalem and would set everything to rights—whatever they thought that might look like or how it might happen. Others were following it all out of curiosity—probably more than a few out of morbid curiosity. They knew Jesus was going to go to Jerusalem and that he'd just get himself into trouble. He would die and that would be the end of yet another failed messiah movement. Anyhow, Luke says in 16:11, that Jesus saw the perfect opportunity for another one of his stories. The crowd was listening and he was so close to Jerusalem and everyone knew that Messiah plus Jerusalem equals kingdom of God. And they were right. But they were also—most of them anyway—they were *so* wrong. So many of them thought they could know God's blessing and have a share in his kingdom without being faithful stewards and without repentance.

So to the gathered crowd, Jesus said, "There was once a nobleman, 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, though, 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. And it's not quite clear. Is this the king in the story talking or is this Jesus talking? And, of course, that's the point—because Jesus *is* the king returning to his people. He says:

"'Let me be clear: 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. I don't think any was necessary. It's remarkable to me how many goofy interpretations there are of this parable. One quick search with Google and I had a link to a Prosperity Gospel website where they linked this to a bunch of nonsense about sowing seeds—which just means sending them money—and getting rich in return. Another link was to some Marxist who was reading it as a condemnation of an evil king who rewarded the rich and condemned the poor. You have to work pretty hard to pull this out of context and then squint at it pretty sideways to go that far off the rails—but it happens all the time. But leave it in context and it's really very simple. The story about a king who returns after a long time away to see what his servants have been up to in his absence is simply Jesus explaining what he's doing himself. 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. But Jesus wanted to get them thinking about what that meant. It meant judgement, but hardly anyone was thinking of it in that sense.

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 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.

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.

The parable prepares the way for Jesus' entry into 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 road, 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 had returned 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 the 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. And with their rebuke ringing in his ears, Luke says in verse 41, that as Jerusalem came into view, Jesus stopped and wept.

“Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! [Jesus said,] But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your

visitation.”

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 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 and he would be rejected here. 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 crashing 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 in order 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:

And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, 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. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for 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 entirely. 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. 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 way.

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 the people took the Lord’s faithfulness and his covenant promises for granted. They lived as if a mere outward façade of faithfulness to the Lord’s covenant would bring his blessings and Jesus

has been reminded 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 send judgement.

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 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 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. 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.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers 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 fulness. 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 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.