

**Sermon for the Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost,
November 17, 2019**

Said Mass

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year C, Proper 27: Malachi 3:13–4:3; Psalm 98:5–10; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13; Luke 21:5–19*

Luke does not give us a day-by-day chronology of Jesus' last days in Jerusalem. He tells us only that Jesus was teaching daily. He does not follow Mark and Matthew where Jesus goes out every evening to the Mount of Olives.¹ Today's gospel lesson is part of a long passage that is Jesus' last public teaching. The passage begins with the words, "One day, as Jesus was teaching in the temple."²

Luke follows Mark, as does Matthew, with what comes next. There are questions to Jesus about the source of his authority. Then come the story where the owner of a vineyard sends his "beloved son" to collect the rent that is due, but whom the tenants kill; the famous question and answer about paying taxes to Caesar; and last Sunday's gospel about a widow who, in turn, was married to her first husband's six brothers.³

¹ Mark 11:11b; Matthew 21:17.

² Luke 20:1.

³ Luke 21:27–40.

Then Jesus gets to ask the Sadducees a question, “How can they say that the Christ is David’s Son?”⁴ Next, there’s a warning about religious leaders who ask too much of the poor.⁵ In Mark and Luke, but not Matthew, Jesus sees a widow giving two coins, all that she has, to the temple.⁶ Finally, we come to today’s gospel lesson. We meet Jesus the prophet, who predicts the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem.⁷

There is an longstanding academic debate about whether the evangelist Mark wrote before or after the fall of Jerusalem in the year AD 70 during the Great Jewish Revolt against the Roman Empire.⁸ That said, there is no reason not to think that Jesus did indeed prophesy the destruction of the temple and the city—Isaiah and Jeremiah had done so in their times.⁹

We know about the conquest of Jerusalem because of the writings of Flavius Josephus, a Pharisee who had acted as interpreter for the Roman general whose army

⁴ Luke 20:41.

⁵ Matthew 23:1–4; Luke 20:45–47.

⁶ Luke 21:1–4.

⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 325–26.

⁸ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, Anchor Bible 27 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 37–39.

⁹ For example: Isaiah 1:24–25; Jeremiah 4:5–10.

took the city.¹⁰ It was a terrible time for the those who did not escape the city before the siege.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus is still in the temple. We hear three commands. He says, in Dr. Mark Davis' translations, first, "Watch that you may not be led astray!"¹¹ Second, "Put [it] into your hearts not to meditate beforehand to defend yourself."¹² Third, though we heard from the RSV, "By your endurance you will gain your lives," there's another imperative verb in the Greek. Dr. Davis translates it this way: "In your patience, possess your souls."¹³ (The King James Version reads, "In your patience possess ye your souls.")

Today's gospel lesson is about trusting God and being in relationship with God. We humans face the chaos of the created world in small and large ways, good and evil, sickness and health. On the harder edges, if you will, of life, I trust that the faith in God that I have known across the years of my life will, even if it weakens, will enfold me when I die. There is something about the

¹⁰ *A Greek-English Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (BDAG) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), *s.v.* "Josephus, Flavius," 759.

¹¹ Luke 21:8. <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2013/11/how-not-to-prepare-for-catastrophe.html>, (accessed 16 November 2019).

¹² Luke 21:14. *Ibid.*

¹³ Luke 21:19. *Ibid.*

King James translation that I really like—it’s the Bible I grew up with, “In your patience possess ye your souls.”

Let me say something about temples and houses. I know I skim footnotes in what I call “books for work” more carefully now that I have done since graduate school. In François Bovon’s commentary on this passage, he refers to an article by John Elliott, who taught at the University of San Francisco, a Jesuit school. The article is called, “Temple versus Household in Luke-Acts: A Contrast in Social Institutions.”¹⁴

By the time Luke writes, the Jerusalem of Jesus, of Paul, and of the first generation of believers, is no more. The temple is in ruins; its treasures are in Rome—you can see them to this day on the Arch of Titus, the general whose army destroyed Jerusalem. For Christians, houses were the place they gathered. Their new temple is the mystical body of Christ. Christian worship centers on testimonies, prophecies, letters, and sharing meals. They sing. They collect money to feed hungry others. They send out believers who seem to have a call to evangelize. Of all places, the-then great metropolitan city of Rome had so many diverse immigrant, that is,

¹⁴ François Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, trans. James Crouch, Hermeneia, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 99, 109 n.29.

language, groups, it seems that “there was not one “bishop” in Rome until about the middle of the second century.”¹⁵ The experience and interaction of small groups shaped what was handed down by Paul, the evangelists, and the authors of what becomes the New Testament.

Trusting in Jesus’ triumph over suffering and death was an everyday reality for most who came to believe that this Jesus was the Son of the living God. These beliefs were not the private devotions of individuals, but the convictions of people who journeyed together as communities of faith. We have temples, as it were, now, and they have many important and good uses—I believe our open doors at this time and in this place really do matter. Christian belief invites us into relationship with others. You and I are already on the journey. May God give us faith to see light whenever darkness approaches our hearts: In our patience, may we possess our souls.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹⁵ Michael Walsh, *The Conclave: A Sometimes Secret and Occasionally Bloody History of Papal Elections* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2003), 3.