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TRUST IN GOD'S PLAN NO MATTER WHAT . . .

Luke 21:5-19 Isiah 65:17-25

Even though good news/bad news jokes are corny, we like them. They appeal to the cynic in us that expects the world to operate in that order--good news, then bad news.

A young man phones up his dad at work for a chat.

Dad says, "I'm sorry, son, but I'm real busy today."

Son says, "But I've got some good news and some bad news for you, Dad."

Dad says, "OK, but since I've got no time now, just give me the good news."

Son says, "Well, the air bag in my car works . . ." (1)

An art gallery owner says to an artist, "I have some good news and some bad news."

The artist asks, "What's the good news?"

Gallery owner says, "The good news is that a woman came in here today asking if the price of your paintings would go up after you die. When I told her they would, she bought every one of your paintings."

Artist says, "That's great! What's the bad news?"

Gallery owner says, "The bad news is that woman was your doctor!" (2)



At the famous Lloyd's of London insurance house, there is an historic bell that they call the Bad News Bell. In 1799, a large frigate ship, the HMS Lutine set sail from London to Hamburg, Germany. Hamburg was facing a financial crisis, and the HMS Lutine was loaded with gold and silver intended to help stave off a crash of the German stock market. Unfortunately, a great storm caught the HMS Lutine, and she sank off the Dutch coastline. Of the 240 crew members on board, only one survived. All of the HMS Lutine's cargo was lost at sea. *Lloyd's paid the claim in full, and just two weeks after the disaster. That Lutine disaster created Lloyd's reputation for paying valid claims – and for having the financial wherewithal to withstand a loss of such legendary proportions.*

In 1858, divers found part of the wreckage of the Lutine, including the ship's bell. The bell was turned over to Lloyd's of London, the insurance underwriters who had insured the HMS Lutine's original trip. The folks at Lloyd's of London hung the bell in the underwriter's office. They started a new tradition with it.

For many years, whenever a ship was late in arriving at its destination, a Lloyd's employee rang the bell once to let all the brokers know the bad news. If the missing ship arrived safely, the bell was rung twice. The good news followed the bad. The bell was sounded to ensure that all brokers and underwriters in the building were made aware of the news simultaneously. In recent years, the keepers of the bell have rung it to commemorate solemn occasions, such as the terrorist attacks on 9/11. (3)

In our Bible passage today, Jesus had to deliver some terrible news to his disciples. But he didn't deliver it in the good news/bad news formula we're accustomed to. Jesus told them the bad news first, but then he told them the good news—that God had already planned to help them persevere when events in the future became painful and chaotic.

THE TEMPLE: Jesus and his disciples are standing in courts of the Temple in Jerusalem, and his disciples remark on the beauty of this place. What did the disciples see when they looked at the Temple? The Temple courts sat on 36 acres of land. The giant stones that made up the Temple were dazzling white marble, some of which were gold plated, reflecting the sunlight. The pillars of the porches that surrounded the temple were columns of white marble, forty feet high, each one carved from a single block of stone. A carving of a grape vine decorated the perimeter, made of solid gold, the clusters of grapes as tall as a man. It was a magnificent building. It was unthinkable to the Jews that the glory of the temple would ever fade or be shattered.

Jesus has the sad task of telling his disciples that this magnificent center of Jewish life and faith was destined for destruction: indeed, the Romans demolished and burned it in 70AD. Compare the trauma to that to the fire that engulfed Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris last spring, because the Temple was the center of the Jewish faith. On top of that, Jesus said his followers would experience persecution and violence because of their commitment to him.

Life as they knew it was going to fall apart.

We have faced events that shook us, challenged us, and forever changed our lives.

We know how hard it is to trust God when you don't understand what is happening...or why.

In verse 6, Jesus says, “As for what you see here. . .” Those six words speak volumes! It is easy to put our faith . . . to anchor our hope . . . in the things we can touch and see in this world. It's easy to be impressed by appearances . . . by possessions . . . by symbols of security . . . even though some of these symbols are superficial and, in some cases, not even real.

I read this week that the world market for counterfeit copies of brand-name clothing —counterfeit purses, counterfeit watches, counterfeit shoes, etc. brought in estimated \$462 BILLION DOLLARS last year! That's billion with a “b.” Now experts predict that the market for counterfeit goods will reach \$2.3 TRILLION in two years, by the year 2022.

The most counterfeited goods in the world are shoes and clothes like Nike and Levis, handbags and watches by brands like Cartier and Coach, and—this is the one that's scary—medications like Tamiflu, Lipitor and Viagra. (5)

Are you wearing something that is counterfeit?

More crucial, are you believing in some things that are counterfeit;
putting your faith and trust in false gods and empty promises?

We easily put our trust in things we can touch, things we can see, things we can own. We put our trust in worldly power and physical possessions. We find security and significance in our homes and our church buildings, our appearance and our possessions. We're tempted to chase after false prophets or gurus who promise us security and significance.

Jesus knew that after he ascended into heaven, some of his followers could stray away from their faith under the Roman's persecution and suffering. When we are scared or worried or confused, we

want even more to control our lives, our circumstances, and we tend to focus inward and try to solve things ourselves, control things ourselves. That, however, makes us even more fearful and anxious.

The solution to anxiety is to trust God's plan no matter what the future holds. Easier said than done, right? But hear again what Jesus says in verse 14: *"But make up your mind not to prepare your defense in advance."* Again, "Make up your mind not to worry beforehand . . ." You can't possibly know all that is going to happen in the future – you can't prepare a ready response...some things you'll just have to experience, perhaps even endure.

But God has a purpose for your life. God has a plan, a master plan, a plan bigger and better than anything we can construct on our own. God has the perspective of history past, present, and future; and God has a plan for ultimate good. God's providence is shaping you into the person God plans for you to be and to do the things God plans for you to do!

Sometimes things get in the way. Sometimes things fall apart. Sometimes things go awry. People disappoint us; decisions don't go our way. Temple crash...dreams shatter. But Jesus reassures us in verse 15...you can face whatever comes, you can speak what you need to speak and do what you need to do if you trust in God and trust in Jesusand...read verse 15, *in those times of crisis and uncertainty you will be given "words and wisdom which no opponents can withstand or contradict."* Mathew 24:20 and Mark 13:11 promise the Holy Spirit as provider of your speech, your wisdom, your guidance, your courage. Jesus repeatedly promises that we will never meet our tribulations alone; just as God says repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments, "Fear Not, I am with you to deliver you."

From the beginning of his ministry to the end of his days on earth, Jesus cast the vision of a heavenly kingdom in which all people from all nations would find identity and security. That kingdom is already here, he said, in your midst, in me, and all around you. Don't put your security in a magnificent Temple, put it in the presence of God within you and all around you and God's purpose in your life! Jesus took his message and his teachings outside the Temple, into the streets and into the fields with the common folk. He took his message to the lepers and the Samaritans, to the sinners and tax collectors, to women and children. In John's gospel, chapter 4, he shared a secret with a despised Samaritan woman. He told her that worship is no longer confined to the Temple in Jerusalem. He told her *"a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."*

All the earthly things in which we put our trust will one day be destroyed. The kingdom of God is not something we can touch or see. It is the Spirit of God working in human hearts to bring about holiness and justice, righteousness and peace until the day that Jesus comes again.

When we are surrounded by hard times and persecution, when all that's tangible in our lives is falling apart, how can we keep from giving in to fear and running down dead ends?

Jesus says to see your suffering as an opportunity to witness to God's truth. You can change YOUR LIFE FOR THE BETTER if you look at every setback, failure, loss or heartbreak as an opportunity to witness to God's goodness and faithfulness! PLUS, you can change significantly the lives of people around you if you turn your suffering into an opportunity to witness for God's glory!

One of Sandy and my dear friends, Nels Tanner, was a US Navy pilot during Vietnam war. His Phantom F-4 fighter jet was shot down over North Vietnam, Nels was captured, and he spent seven years as a prisoner of war in the Hanoi Hilton. Nels suffered torture and conditions I can't imagine surviving. What got him through the worst times in prison, he said, were Bible verses and snippets of songs and hymns he learned as a child at a Presbyterian Church I served in Tennessee. He knew Jesus was with him to help him endure and to overcome, Jesus gave him wisdom as to what to say and what not to say. Nels witnessed Jesus with him as real as you and I are here together, and with the courage God gave him and the hope of returning home to Sarah and their children, Nels persevered. In later years of the war, prisoners were consolidated in larger cells with many men, and when they could recite Bible verses and sing a verse of two of a song, they bolstered one another's faith and trust and hope and courage. They endured; God gave them words, and an opportunity to witness to one another God's goodness and faithfulness. Just like Jesus promises in Luke 21:15.

When Nels spoke to men's groups in churches in that presbytery, his testimony revealed what Jesus promises in verse 19: *"By your endurance you will gain your souls."* Nels' experience and testimony bolstered my faith in God!

Jesus promises that God has already prepared to defend those who believe in Him. He will give us the words to share our faith with conviction. And if we stand firm, they will win their lives. It's a promise from an eternal and faithful God, and we can bet our whole lives on it without fear, without failure and without regret.

Rplace with corporate Apse4cts of that witness – as in Lectionary Sermons, p250-251.

Diet Eman and her boyfriend, Hein, were Dutch Christians who hid Jewish citizens from the Nazis in World War II. They knew they were risking their lives in this work, but their faith in Jesus compelled them to protect innocent Jews from persecution. In 1944, Hein was arrested and sent to the Dachau concentration camp. Diet was arrested soon after and sent to a different camp. Although she suffered greatly in the camp, she continued to trust in God's promises of protection. She even took a hair pin and scratched Jesus' promise from Matthew 28 on the prison wall, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end" (Matt. 28: 20 KJV).

Diet was eventually released, but Hein died in Dachau. Fellow prisoners reported that Hein radiated the love of Christ in the concentration camp. Before his death, he wrote a final note to Diet. It read, "Darling, don't count on our seeing each other again soon . . . Here we see again that we do not decide our own lives . . . Even if we won't see each other again on earth, we will never be sorry for what we did, that we took this stand. And know, Diet, that of every last human being in this world, I loved you most." (11)

Hear that again. *"Here we see again that we do not decide our own lives . . . Even if we won't see each other again on earth, we will never be sorry for what we did, that we took this stand."*

We do not decide our own lives. And sometimes that is bad news . . . Jesus knew that this truth could cause his followers great fear and anxiety. It could lead them to following false gods and straying from the truth. Or it could lead them to decide beforehand to trust God—to see any suffering that came into their lives as an opportunity for sharing God's faithfulness. And ultimately that leads to

Good News—the greatest good news imaginable that we really are not in control of our lives and our destinies, but a loving God is in control and every good thing in our life that we have lost will be restored. And we will live life more fully and more wondrously than we have ever imagined.

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 3. <https://www.lloyds.com/about-lloyds/history/catastrophes-and-claims/hms-lutine>.
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 6. Elliot Johnson, *The Point After* (Grand Rapids: Daybreak Books, Zondervan Publishing House).
 7. George F. Regas, *Kiss Yourself and Hug the World* (Waco: Word, 1987).
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