

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
 Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost
 Sunday, November 16, 2025
 Guest Preacher: Margaret McGugan
 “I Will Give You Words” Luke 21:5-19**

The temple was beautiful.

It had been refurbished by Herod the Great who had enlarged it for his own purposes. It took eighty years to complete, and the work included a new foundation to withstand the weight of massive stone walls. Herod employed the most talented artisans to use the best materials for the project such as marble that must have weighed tons.

Blue, scarlet and purple Babylonian tapestries made of fine linen formed a veil at the entrance. He installed gold and silver-plated gates and gold gilded doors throughout.

It was Herod’s jewel in his architectural crown.

The disciples were enthralled with its majesty. Anyone would have been.

It must have been breath-taking to stand in this building dedicated to God.

But I wonder why Luke did not write anything about Jesus’ emotions of awe.

Jesus must have prayed with the disciples, or read Isaiah, with his words echoing off the stone walls.

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me; the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” we can image Jesus saying.

But this breath-taking ‘jewel’ did not have the same ‘awe’ effect on Jesus.

The Synagogue, the place for the Jewish people to worship with incense burning and prayers murmuring down the long corridors caught Jesus’ heart.

It was not the grandeur or the fine linen tapestries that captured Jesus’ eye.

It was the people.

He watched the Scribes as they settled in the front rows looking arrogant and dignified in their long robes and dangling tassels.

He watched as the poor widow dropped her two small copper coins into the treasury plate. She gave all her had to live on, for the glory of God and not for the glory of Herod. She came to hear the word of Isaiah or the Psalmist. She came with the word of God on her heart.

In attendance with Jesus, the disciples were admiring the sheer scale of opulence when Jesus suddenly labeled the temple as condemned property.

“As for these things that you see, not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

The disciples could not image the temple in ruins. Who could?

Not one stone upon another?

But when and what sign would be given?

The sheer ambiance must have dissolved as the disciples realized the essence of Jesus' words. Not one stone upon another.

The temple was sacked in 70 CE by Roman legions as Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian documented.

The massive stones were pulled down. Its colourful linen tapestries burned. Herod's temple was for not.

To this day, those huge stones lay where they fell all those years ago. Only the noon day sun outlines their massiveness. What they may have resembled is only in our imaginations.

Jesus is not concerned about human buildings.

Jesus, a Jew, and our Messiah is concerned with the destruction of religious, political and social systems of his day.

He sees the evil intent of humans to lord over the poor and the marginalized.

He is aware of the strategies Herod used to build the temple. Herod's acquired wealth came from political power, military conquests and back-room dealings.

Jesus was concerned about the Law of the Lord which effects everyday life or perhaps, if we could look through Jesus' eyes, the lack of it in the first century.

The Law of the Lord, for Jews, is a set of instructions and statutes that guide the observance of God's commandments and moral teachings as documented in the Book of Deuteronomy.

The Law was what Jesus was concerned about.

And as the gospel writers confirmed, Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. Jesus said this to end any suspicion of him abolishing the Torah.

No, Jesus was concerned about the lives of people and how to protect them from harm.

He was concerned about the disciples' allegiance and faithfulness to God, especially since his time on earth was limited. He had much still to do, to teaching and confiding the power of God in them.

Jesus knew the disciples would be condemned and persecuted as He would be. He knew their lives would be threatened by sceptics. He knew they could be led astray by false prophecies or something worst...by their own fear.

He instructed them about their allegiance to God and the working according to God's plan.

Nothing could be assumed. The disciples must know the grand design of God's redemption. They must be willing to stand up against God's enemies.

But would they be prepared to speak in a turbulent world?

What words could they say to convince the populace of their godly intent.

In this passage, Jesus speaks with compassion and fortitude. He forewarns of the pending betrayal of deceivers and sceptics not just for his disciples' ears, but for us to heed.

"Beware that you are not led astray." Jesus tells us.

Believe that God will provide the words you will need in that moment.

How do we convey our own faith so it can be felt by others who do not have God in their lives?

It is hard sometimes. Words just don't come as easily as we would hope. Sometimes, our mouths get dry, and we stumble to find the right words. Sometimes what we say to others, is ignored. Laughed at.

This passage is not kind. It scares us. The inevitable is still happening.

Luke portrays Jesus as the bearer of bad news. Something unbearable can happen no matter how rehearsed we think we are.

But we are not the first to squirm when God put his people into a tough situation.

Take for instance the story of Moses who felt he could not speak on behalf of God in front of Pharaoh.

"O, my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now...I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (Exodus 4:10)

God replied, 'who gives speech to mortals? Is it not I, the Lord?

Now go, and I will be your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." (Exodus 4:11-12)

Even Moses, a prophet, was hesitant to find the right words. The powerful words that would convince Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people go from slavery.

If a prophet cannot find the right words, how will we as mere mortals.

"Go and I will be your mouth," says God.

Like Moses, we could be standing in front of a persecutor, a deceiver, a king or a church leader. Like Moses we could be confronted with opposition and even death.

What words will we use. Are they the same small breaths of air spoken millennia ago. Words that will endure us with power to gain our souls.

'I will be your mouth,' says God.

This passage is not kind.

Words have been spoken to bring us guidance and protection. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" King David wrote this poem to keep us going when the going got tough.

No, Jesus may appear to be the bearer of bad news. But he is warning us of a potential danger if we continue to follow him. If we continue to be his disciple.

Jesus instructs us that we will not only need words but wisdom to get us through this tearing down of Herodian temples. He tells us we will experience hurt and betrayal and uncertainties. We will trust people who are untrustworthy.

This passage is to prepare our lives with assurance, and confidence, that when times get tough, God will be our mouth.

This passage talks about insurrection and struggle, battle and awe. It talks about events that have already happened, events happening right now and events happening in the future.

Jesus is making us aware of the destruction of religious, political and social system of our day.

Powerful people still build strongholds around themselves engulfing hatred and false doctrines. They will buy votes so they can sit in the front rows of the stone structures.

They will forget the widow and the foreigner.

It is only a matter of time when their ideology will fall.

Perhaps this scary passage will get our attention if even for a few moments. But that is not end of an age, it is just the beginning.

People are transitional. People are mere mortals.

But the word of God is the small breath of air alive in our lives.

The word of God is elusive and free. It has no boundaries nor confining structures to keep it in.

Yet sometimes it feels like it is buried under that heap of stones, unable to breathe in our corrupt world. It seems our words are meaningless and empty.

Hush, says God. Do not let negative thoughts enter your mind.

For I am the Alpha and the Omega. I am the first and the last.

'I will be your mouth,' "I will give you the words you need at that pressing time. says God.

You will be the vessel, and I will be the spokesperson.

Oh, I believe the temple was grand and opulent, and I am sure Jesus worshipped there praising God.

But the gospel is not confided to structures.

Jesus witnessed God's work with bread and fish on a mountain side.

He healed and touched with words from God.

He believed upon his death that he would return.

The Word of God echoes louder than the roaring seas; it sings above the raging floods; it rings louder than the lyre, the trumpet, and the horn.

There is nothing that can destroy the Word of God.

There is nothing that can impede the Spirit of God.

The Word is in the beginning, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

'I will give you words,' says Jesus to bring in the Good News of the new heaven and the new earth.

'I will be your mouth.'

My only question for us today is, do we trust the Lord will deliver?

Amen.