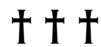


If the histories are to be believed,
the temple in Jerusalem, Herod's Temple,
was striking in its grandeur,
breathtaking in its magnificence,
flawless in its design.

Spanning 40 acres, built with massive, quarried limestones,
the structure was clad
in white marble and solid gold plates that reflected the sun,
making it appear to be a shining, snow-covered mountain.
The temple building itself, wide at the front and narrow at the back,
was reputed to resemble a seated lion.



An awesome architectural feat,
the temple in Jerusalem, Herod's Temple,
doubtless, stopped many in their tracks
and caused them, like the Psalmist, to testify:
"This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."



Yet, as marvelous as King Herod's building project was,
for Jesus, more marvelous still was the widow's offering
of two small copper coins, everything she had to live on.
Remember her, this poor widow, about whom we hear
in the first four verses of the 21st chapter of Luke's Gospel,
the verses *right before* our Gospel reading this morning.
While onlookers were captivated, dare I say distracted,
by this marvel of limestone and mortar, marble and gold, *this building*,
Jesus was still thinking about this poor widow,
this human being and her plight. Remember her.



Thinking about this poor widow,

lamenting the disconnect between what the temple ought to signify

and the divisions and inequity the temple really concretized,

Jesus said,

“As for these things that you see, the days will come

when not one stone will be left upon another;

all will be thrown down.”

Then, as he was often wont to do,

Jesus said many, many, many more things.

Jesus offered what The Rev. Patrick Willson describes

as a “rambling, discombobulated directory of events.”

Jesus prophesied that he would be the victim of identity theft.

Jesus prophesied that there would be

wars and earthquakes, plagues and famines.

Jesus prophesied that there would be

arrests and persecution, betrayal and hatred, even death.

Not to predict the end times, but to reveal existential truth.

Beloved, less than forty years after Jesus prophesied

that false teachers would come in his name and

that Jerusalem would be sacked and the temple razed to dust,

it happened, just as Jesus said it would.

Jesus told the truth, because he loves us.

Jesus told the truth so that when these things happened,

and as they continued to and still happen,

we might believe, so that we might discern the truthfulness of

and receive life from his words.

But not only that.



Strange as it seems, Jesus prophesied all these things so that
when they happened, and as they continued to and still happen,
where others see obstacles, *we see opportunities . . .*
not to trade division, but to transcend our differences.
not to seek retribution, but to offer renewal,
not to raise hell, but to seek wholeness,
not to create more distractions, but to care more deeply,
not to panic, but to praise,
not to despair the future, but to deepen our faith,
not to succumb to terror, *but to testify . . .*

To testify that . . .

God's grace is not limited by circumstance.

God's mercy is not canceled by sin.

God's love is not overpowered by evil.

God's life is not defeated by death.

That even when, especially when, *we are shaken*
by the swift and varied changes and chances of this life,
Jesus' promises *remain* unshakeable.

That the words of that Roman Catholic hymn are true:

*Though the mountains may fall and the hills turn to dust,
yet the love of the Lord will stand
as a shelter for all who will call on God's name
sing the praise and the glory of God.*



Make no mistake, Beloved.

This is Jesus' promise to us: *the love of the Lord will stand.*

The love of the Lord will stand *against*

apathy and hatred and cruelty and ignorance and hunger

and poverty and homelessness and demonization and discrimination and violence and

abuse of power and sin and evil.

The love of the Lord will stand *for*

love and mercy and grace and understanding and patience

and holy curiosity and forgiveness and healing and reconciliation.

The love of the Lord will stand *with us*

with me, with you,

when you're trying to figure out who you are and who you love,

when you're struggling with your body-image,

when you can't seem to launch,

when your partner or spouse is unfaithful,

when you're sick or depressed or doubting yourself,

when you lose your job,

when your relationships or your marriage ends,

when your child or spouse or companion or friend dies,

when your mind or body begins to fail or decline,

when you close your eyes for the final time.

The love of the Lord will stand.



The love of the Lord will stand, because it's personal for Jesus.

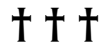
Jesus prophesied this "rambling, discombobulated directory of events"

because he still had that poor widow on his mind.

Jesus told us the truth so that even when the "fit" hits the "shan,"

we, like that poor widow, can offer everything we have with clarity, courage, and conviction.

Because we discern that the words and wisdom that Jesus gives
are the gift of himself and the assurance of his presence come what may.
And that these words and wisdom
do not merely describe a kingdom, but fashion a habitable place *right here, right now.*



Last week, in response to growing food insecurity
caused partly by the withholding of SNAP benefits,
DEAM, Decatur-area Emergency Assistance Ministry,
was swamped with donations of canned goods and other foodstuffs
from PORCH, a food collection non-profit,
and other ministry partners.
The whole right-side of Tisdale Hall was full of donations.



Beloved, the church is not a building, but the Body of Christ, a people
called to testify to the abiding presence and transforming power
of God's love in our lives and in the world.

Because it's personal.

While we gather here to worship God
in stone and stained-glass, in word and music and song,
with candles and incense, in vestments and other finery, as we ought to do,
our fervent prayer should always be
that our witness, which is our worship in the world,
that our witness, which manifests the never-failing,
ever-abiding love of God as a shelter for all who call on God's name,
that our witness causes us and all those who experience this love
to exclaim, like the Psalmist:

"This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

Amen.