

Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church
Rio Rancho, NM

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IN EVERY ENDING A NEW BEGINNING

Luke 21: 25-36

Have you ever wondered why certain stories are remembered and passed on in Scripture. The Gospel of John reminds us that Jesus did and said many other things not written down. So many that if everything had been written down, “the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” So many stories, so many decisions as to which make the cut.

One reason stories were remembered is that they had contemporary relevance for First Century Christians. Most scholars agree that all the Gospels were put into their present form after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. That event sent shock waves not only through the Jewish community but also the early church. Many wondered what that cataclysmic event meant, how they were to understand it.

Many thought that such a momentous event-like 9/11 in our country-surely must signal the end of the world. The Synoptic Gospel writers all record this event stressing one thing-no, the end of the Temple is NOT the end of the world. It is the end of an era, the Second Temple era. But not the end of the world.

The fall of the Temple is just the beginning of the Christian mission. So stay focused and stay tuned. More is yet to come. In the end is the beginning. That’s what Jesus seems to be saying. Consider the Last Supper. Yes, it was Jesus’ final meal with his followers. But it inaugurated the New Covenant with them “sealed

in his blood for the forgiveness of sins.” In every ending there is a new beginning.

In the events leading up to the destruction of the Temple Jesus sees a parallel to the events surrounding the end of the world. These cataclysmic events are not the same thing, but they do resemble each other. He says that the actual end of the world will be accompanied by these cataclysmic events: signs in the sky, the shaking of the powers of the heaves, the roaring of the seas and huge waves, like tsunamis. Then the nations will experience terrible distress and fear. All people will be overwhelmed with foreboding of what is coming. This is the true apocalypse, the final chapter in the story.

Yet in this doomsday scenario, Jesus surprisingly calls for hope. He says that “when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” He points to the fig tree blooming and says that these buds herald the coming of spring, the promise that “the kingdom of God is near.” There is more to come, redemption and renewal.

All these shattering events compel us to watch and hope for the coming of the Son of Man. The end of all things is but the beginning of the “world to come”, a new world redeemed and transformed. These events promise the answered prayer of millions: “thy kingdom come”. So instead of seeing the unsettling events of the end as dreadful, Jesus invites his followers to “lift up their heads” and lift up your hearts because your redemption is drawing near.

Now that is what we call “re-framing”. Jesus asks his followers to see these cataclysmic events in an entirely different way. I remember a story from the French Revolution when a crowd gathered to protest and French soldiers brought out their cannons. The commanding officer ordered that the “rabble” be shot. And so a

junior officer announced to the crowd, “We are under orders to shoot the rabble. But since I see only good citizens of Paris, I ask you to clear the square so we can shoot the rabble.” Well, that cleared the square. And that’s called “re-framing.”

Jesus takes note of the anxiety and dread we have of future events. Including our own death. He anticipates the fainting and fear. Despite our fears he encourages us to “take heed lest your hearts be weighted down with the cares of this life.” We are to pray that we receive strength to “escape all these things...to stand before the Son of Man.” A shorthand way of saying, “Be of good cheer. For Christ has overcome the world and all its fears.” That’s reframing.

Fears within, foes without, and anxiety everywhere. For sure. But here is the good news. For us the end is just the beginning. Advent is the beginning of the new liturgical year. And every Advent begins with the end, the coming of the Son of Man in glory and power. And we conclude every Advent with the coming of the Son of Man in weakness at Bethlehem. So in Advent we celebrate both the humility and the glory of Christ our Lord. The beginning and the end.

And we celebrate this deep and profound truth-in every ending is a new beginning. True for Advent and true for our lives. Whether a lost relationship or lost job or lost health or lost wealth or lost faith. In your congregation a long and fruitful pastorate has ended and now you are in a new beginning.

Whatever fears and anxieties haunt us, there is a path forward. There is something on the other side of the darkness. Why? Because God can create something out of nothing. Your life can begin again. Out of the rubble something new is promised. So lift up your head. Your redemption is drawing near. In the turbulence and in the fear, God is with you. That is the promise of Advent. In every ending there is a new beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.