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| Sermon 11-17-19  Reality Check – Are You Ready?  Luke 21:5-19  During the Christian year the Revised Common Lectionary focuses on the Resurrection as the theme for Sunday lessons twice. The first is Easter, when we would naturally think about resurrection. The second is the last three weeks of the Christian year, culminating on Christ-the-King Sunday, this year on November 24th. This will be our focus for the next two weeks.  For you parrot-heads here today, you may be familiar with what I am about to say. For those of you who are not parrot-heads, fans of Jimmy Buffet, he cut an album in 1994 called *Fruitcakes*. On that album was a track by the same name. A couple lines from that song go like this:  Paradise, lost and found Paradise, take a look around I was out in California where I hear they have it all They got riots, fires and mud slides They've got sushi in the mall  Water bars and Brontosaurs Chinese modern lust Shake and bake life with the quake The secret's in the crust[[1]](#endnote-1)  If you have been watching the news of late, we have seen the devastation caused by the recent **GRAPHIC: wildfires in California**. It is hard to imagine the magnitude and power of this force of nature, **GRAPHIC: fueled by surreal winds, yet the pictures and video clips we see only tell part of the story.** We don’t feel the heat. We don’t live through the worry and the angst. **GRAPHIC: It used to be the fires were confined to uninhabited areas. Now, entire cities are being destroyed.** That’s the new reality of living in California.  Since we moved to Iowa, we no longer worry about riots, fires and mud slides. We left behind the shake and bake life with the quake and exchanged it for rain, snow, ice and tornados!  I’ve had the opportunity to talk with some of you about this exchange. I didn’t mind earthquakes, but what really gets my heart pumping now is hearing Channel 9 say, “There’s a tornado on the ground near the Tipton area!” Yikes!  **The Day of the Lord**    In today’s scripture passage, Jesus is teaching in the temple and tells the people to get ready and stay ready.  While people marveled at the temple’s grand scale**, GRAPHIC: Jerusalem Temple** its construction, its massive columns and its decorations — truly one of the wonders of the ancient world — Jesus said, “... the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”  People want to know more, and in response, Jesus describes the terrible end that the great temple of Jerusalem will come to. But even as he begins to describe the end of all things — the terrible Day of the Lord — he makes it clear that we cannot use earth-shaking events as a reliable guide that the end is finally at hand.  Solomon’s temple, the first temple, had been destroyed by the Babylonians, after which the Judean leadership had been led into exile. After Babylon’s fall and upon the return of the exiles, the people envisioned rebuilding their lost temple.  The effort languished, however, because of political opposition, exhaustion and the problems of day-to-day living. Prophets like Haggai and Zechariah called the people back to the great task, but even so, it took decades for the temple to be built to the point where it could be used, and centuries until, under the leadership of the flawed and much hated Herod the Great, it was brought to a state of grandeur.  Surely, God’s people must have felt that everything else could be destroyed when the great Day of the Lord came, but God’s temple would surely be left standing. So many would have viewed Jesus’ prediction about the temple’s destruction as scandalous — perhaps even treasonous. **GRAPHIC: Capitol landmarks at night** It would be as if an American celebrity today claimed that our national landmarks in Washington, DC, might also face destruction. In fact, government officials might well investigate us if we were to make such statements.  The words of Jesus were no less startling, precisely because he was talking about **GRAPHIC: The Day of the Lord.**  The idea of the Day of the Lord, when God would intervene in history and set things to right, is a staple of the prophets in the Hebrew scriptures. And although some of the judgments of these prophets were directed at foreign powers and superpowers, when the prophets spoke of the Day of the Lord, they were just as likely to be reminding God’s people that if they did not set their own houses in order, they, and not their enemies, would be the target of God’s wrath.  Amos, for instance, made it clear that the Day of the Lord would be no refuge for God’s people. “Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light.”[[2]](#endnote-2)  In fact, in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 24 specifically addresses the end of the age, the destruction of the temple, persecutions, desolating sacrilege, the coming of the Son of Man, and the necessity for watchfulness.  So, also in our gospel passage this morning, Jesus points to signs and wonders, natural disasters, wars and civil unrest, as normal events in the course of things. These were not to be interpreted as signs that the end was at hand.  Not even the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, a political event that was still a few decades in the future when Jesus spoke these words, meant that the world would end. All of these events would, however, give believers a chance to testify about Jesus, despite persecution and betrayal. And the words of Jesus would provide the testimony we as believers are meant to give in difficult times.    **Be prepared**  What this passage tells us, I believe, is that just as folks in the California need to be prepared for wildfires, and we in Iowa need to be ready for tornados, so too should we take seriously the words of Jesus not only about the end, but about the dangers of the world before the end.  And rather than believe that we have an inside track when all this occurs, we should recognize that governments and nations may fall, the earth may shake and tsunamis may lay waste to coastlines. Therefore, let us honor Jesus by imitating him in **GRAPHIC: Serving line** service to the poor, the neglected and the oppressed. **GRAPHIC: Feeding in Backman Hall** Then our actions shall demonstrate that Jesus reigns now, in our hearts, and will reign upon the earth eternally.  Jesus warned us that some of our persecution may come from those we love and trust, and by “family,” Jesus may have meant not only relatives, but fellow citizens and even fellow believers. This too should tell us we are on the right track.  Of course, it’s not enough to *get* ready. We have to *stay* ready. **GRAPHIC: Y2K Ad** At the start of this millennium there was a great deal of fearmongering about Y2K, a computer glitch that was supposedly going to lead to the total breakdown of society and mass chaos. Many people stored supplies such as generators and extra food and water, against that event.  January 1, 2000, came and went, and according to one account, many people in Elkhart County, Indiana, sold their generators and used up their supplies. Thirteen months later, a massive ice storm hit that led to loss of power in some places for many days or even weeks, and during the coldest part of winter. Some individuals who had prepared for an apocalyptic Y2K meltdown were totally unprepared for an ordinary natural disaster.  In his essay **GRAPHIC: “The World’s Last Night**,” C.S. Lewis said that the best way to prepare for the end of the world is to be found at our post, working for Jesus, and through Jesus, to serve those who are suffering in the world. Rather than look to the sky at the great astronomical wonders and study the headlines for the political news that Jesus warns us about, we are to serve the widow, wash the feet of the disciples and offer that cup of cold water in his name.  After all, whether or not we are alive on the great day of his return, we all have our own Day of the Lord — our own judgment — to prepare for. Let us not panic. Nor let us fatalistically do nothing. Let us store up our own survival supplies, **GRAPHIC 1: like the Word of God**, **GRAPHIC 2: the body of Christ** (found in our church) and the strength we find with each other to do **GRAPHIC 3: God’s will.**     In the name or the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. |
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1. <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jimmybuffett/fruitcakes.html>, accessed 10/28/2019 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Amos 5:18. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)