

Temples of God
Luke 21: 5-19

I've experienced many special ministry settings over the years but none more holy more spiritually alive than the free Community Breakfast held in the fellowship room of the Community Reformed Church. Every Friday morning I would join anywhere from 75 to 125 people of the community for breakfast. Some knew I was a pastor, others did not and I tried to keep it that way.

The room was filled with round tables with eight chairs to a table. Around those 8' portable altars would gather single mothers with 2-3-4 children in tow, members of the local Native American tribes, veterans and old hippies, widows and widowers. Some were there because they needed the free breakfast and some more than the meal needed the social time. And you knew there were some there who didn't need the free breakfast and if they were so inclined could have covered the cost of the breakfast for everyone for a year and not made a dent in their wallet. The mayor would be there and along with city and county officials would break toast with men who had spent the night at the Safe Harbor Shelter in the former church parsonage next door.

The servers, people in the kitchen and at the two fellows at the "Chefs choice" tables out front were from at least 5 different congregations and a few who did not nor would not darken the doors of any place of worship. Yet, every week, worship was conducted over the scrubbing of pots and pans, flipping pancakes or waffles on electric griddles. And from the kitchen came the sacred music of the 1960's rock n' roll. Depending on who was the kitchen leader for the day it might be the 70's.

After your first visit you would always be greeted by name and if Ron was one of the "chefs" manning an electric griddle out front you might get a hug too. Birthdays were celebrated with joyful voices that would have made choir directors cringe and cover their ears but to the ears of the 93 or 3 year old it was heavenly. Lives were shared, personal, family and community concerns held in quiet prayer over eggs cooked to order, sausage, home fries, pancakes and occasionally a breakfast sandwich or burrito. And

towards the end of the morning we would be joined by the high school special needs class who would eat with us and then help put things away.

Yes indeed, that fellowship hall was a holy temple, as holy, if not more so than the sanctuary which opened up to one side of breakfast tables.

“Some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God...”

And 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.”*

We all know the old adages: Nothing lasts; the only constant is change, etc. Presidents come and go, businesses rise and flourish then fail and are forgotten, and the old farm we grew up on has become a housing development, or a strip malls and rows of storage units. Interstates cut ugly swaths across what was uninterrupted woods and farmland, and their exchanges become indistinguishable oases of fast food and filling stations. And yes, even churches close their doors and the “Old Man” fell off the mountain.

The people of Jesus’ time looked to the Temple and its glory as something permanent. Something that would stand the test of time that would be there for their children’s children. But sadly, what was a symbol of their faith had become the *object* of their faith. Instead of worshiping God in the temple they had turned their devotion to the building. Thus Jesus reminds them, *“As for these things you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”* And as we know from history this came to pass in 70 c.e. when Rome sacks Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. The readers of Luke’s gospel would have known this.

Jesus then goes into what is classified as his apocalyptic vision. (We find versions of this in Matthew and Mark as well.) We must be careful not to take these words of Jesus and turn them into some sort of judgment day time table. If we can read them without any preconceived theological framework, we can see that they are events that seem to happen in every

generation to one extent or another. Earthquakes, famines, plagues, persecutions and war! Regrettably, there is always war!

In light of this it seems to me that Jesus is saying that these things are bound to happen, and the reality in which we live presently is not permanent. Not even the Temple and all its glory *so don't put your faith in the temple*. For it too is transitory. What makes a temple holy is not the temple but the reality of the Divine it should point us to.

He is also saying do not rely on your own wisdom or the wisdom of the day. Jesus warns that false prophets will come and go; today we have our "experts" and "special political consultants." He says the wisdom we will need will be given when it is needed. And it will not come from the world's "experts", religious, political, or astrological but from the spirit within.

But most importantly as we heard last week through the prophet Haggai and this week through Jesus, after he tells of all the trials and troubles that come in life, he offers this comforting reminder: *"But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."*

The Voice paraphrase of the Bible reads like this: *But whatever happens, not a single hair of your heads will be harmed. By enduring all of these things, you will find not loss but gain—not death but **authentic** life.*

Haggai, *"My Spirit abides among you."*

I think of the last words of Matthew's gospel, *"And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

As far as I know the free Community breakfast is still going strong and growing. And as much as I would like to think it might, it will not last forever. There will come a day when the tables will be rolled up in their carriers, the chairs stacked in a corner, the electric griddles tossed out, the church kitchen will no longer be rocking to the Beach Boys and Beatles with a little Neil Diamond thrown in. But the spirit of God that made that place, that ministry a holy space, a temple dedicated to God, does endure.

And so, will it be with us and our church, our sanctuary, our Parish House. We are facing challenges, societal/cultural foundation shaking times.

And things we thought were permanent, as solid as the stones this sanctuary is built of, will be understood for what they are. The structures of our church, both physical and organizational (our buildings and our by-laws & policies) are the means through which the work of Christ has been done today. And it falls to each generation to diligently maintain and update them that this work of Christ be continued in fresh and relevant ways.

But let us not be confused. The structures of our church are not the end all and be all, the objects of our worship. What makes this place a place of God is the presence of God. And that presence of God dwells in you and me. And it will dwell in the people who follow us, who will do their thing in their day.

So, it is crucial that while we strive to maintain our buildings and our by-laws, policies and procedures, in order to have something of lasting value to pass on, we need to even more so,

nurture the presence of the Spirit in our midst,

we need to nurture and pass on the faith that is ours to pass on,

for that is what is important, that is what will last.

Long after the free breakfast has finished what will survive will be the relationships that were formed, the faith that was shared in hugs, birthday wishes, words of counsel and prayers. The same is true for us. While we need to care for what we have, the generations that follow us will need something from us more enduring than these buildings.

They will need our faith which is the basis of our hope, and to know the love of Christ through us.

Let's make sure we pass these things on!