

## Faithful Endurance

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Pentecost 23: Luke 21:5-19

5When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, 6“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.” 7They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” 8And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them. 9“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” 10Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; 11there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. 12“But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. 13This will give you an opportunity to testify. 14So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; 15for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. 16You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. 17You will be hated by all because of my name. 18But not a hair of your head will perish. 19By your endurance you will gain your souls.

*The destruction of the Temple in 70AD, leads to a crisis of faith for Jesus' followers. Luke writes after this time...a message of hope to the followers of Jesus who are being persecuted. There are persecuted Christians all over the world today. What kind of message do they need to stay strong? How can we support them? The Spirit of God is stronger than a building. The Holy Spirit will always create and sustain the church.*

Beloved of God, what does the word endurance bring to mind? Does the word make you think about athletes who train over days, weeks and months? Perhaps that word leads you to think about raising up a particularly challenging child? Or working for a difficult boss? Was it a crisis of faith during a time of illness? Or a veteran struggling with war-time injuries?

During Bible study on Thursday, we were thinking of synonyms for the word, ‘endurance.’ Words like courage, strength, patience, loyalty. Can you think of a

time in your life when you truly needed courage, strength, patience, loyalty...endurance?

So how about this question. \*\*Have we ever had to endure for our faith? What do we need, to keep on keeping on in our love of Jesus and God?

In the text, all the disciples are admiring how gorgeous the Temple is. They were not wrong. It was the symbol of national identity, their faith, the center of their life together. King Herod had been beautifying it for years, spending incredible amounts of money to have the Temple rival pagan temples of his contemporaries. It was massive with the capacity to hold 400,000 people at once at Festivals.

The Jewish people of the day loved that it was huge and glorious, fit to honor God. Yet, it was also a sore spot; having been built by conniving Herod, who would never fit fully into the Jewish family.

Then Jesus tells the disciples, it will one day be destroyed. It was destroyed...in 70 AD. That was a crisis of faith for Jesus' followers; for all Jews who loved God and loved the Temple. St. Luke wrote this Gospel about 30 years after the demolition in the shadows of ruins. Yes, Luke wrote Jesus' words to the people 20-30 years after the temple was destroyed, as a message of hope to stand strong and that God was with them, even in times of persecution. Listen again...

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ... But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Several of my college classmates went to be missionaries after graduation. They went to countries where Christians were minorities to spread the Gospel underground. Before they left, my friends handed out very specific instructions about letter writing. “Avoid these phrases. If we write \*\*\* that means the underground ministry is flourishing. If we write\*\*\* that means, we’re struggling. Please assume that every letter you write will be opened and read before we receive it. Our safety depends upon your adherence to these stipulations.”

That was 30 years ago and Christians the world over today, are still living in fear of being caught worshipping. In countries like Afghanistan, North Korea, Somalia, and Yemen, Christians can be arrested, interrogated, forced to recant their faith and even put to death.

The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews website says this. “Terrorists and militants like ISIS and many others are destroying churches, artifacts, documents, symbols of religious history, and hundreds of holy sites in an attempt to annihilate the Christian culture. But even more tragically, destroying innocent lives.” (<https://www.ifcj.org/who-we-help/persecuted-and-oppressed> International Fellowship of Christians and Jews) Likewise persecution of Jews didn’t end with Holocaust survivors. Anti-semitism is real and they, too, are persecuted for their faith. We’ve seen it in the United States and overseas. The Fellowship takes food to people barely surviving in cardboard houses in Eastern Europe.

One section of ADF International’s (Alliance Defending Freedom International) ministry is to provide lawyers worldwide defending Christians who have been wrongly accused for their faith. (<https://adfinternational.org/shagufta-and-shafqat-pakistan/>) There you can read about \*Maira who at the age of 14 was kidnapped on her way to school and forced to marry an older man. He made her convert from Christianity. She managed to escape after enduring a terrible relationship. Maira is in hiding now until justice is done in the form of annulling the marriage.

Let’s pray right now for our brothers and sisters in the faith...

How grateful we are to be able to come to worship freely! I’m guessing that we might feel a bit differently if we knew that the police were outside these doors ready to arrest us when church finished. Perhaps then, we wouldn’t mind a longer sermon? (Smile) Seriously, if we were Christians who were hounded, wrongly accused, and even oppressed for our faith, would this message of Jesus help us stay strong?

Yes, it would! Indeed, Jesus gives incredible promises to those who love and follow Him. “You will be given words and wisdom when it comes time to tell your story. Even your own family will betray you; you might even be killed. Yet, by your endurance, you will gain your souls.”

After Jesus was killed, Jews persecuted previous Jews for not following the Law and Romans also oppressed Christians because they didn’t worship the Jewish God, nor the Roman gods. The Temple might have been destroyed, but the Holy

Spirit never stopped bringing believers together. As St. Paul travelled, he established churches in places like Ephesus, Philippi, and Galatia. The one true God didn't live in the Temple, for the Holy Spirit was with all who broke bread and prayed together. The sermon began with a question for us about our endurance to live for God. But the truth is, the Holy Spirit won't ever give up on the Church, either.

As much as we are fallible human beings, who love the church and have hurt the church, Jesus brings a message of hope. "By your endurance, your souls will be saved." As faithful Lutherans we know, God gives us such endurance in times of trials.

Most of all, we trust that God is with us and for us whatever trials may come.  
Amen.