

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, in our Prayer of the Day, we pray for steadfast faith amidst the tumult of the world. We are praying this because our appointed prayer of the day is centered on our lessons that seem to have an apocalyptic air about them, especially our Gospel. From that apocalyptic fear of all the so-called evil we perceive to be happening in the world today, I've been asked more than once, "Pastor, are we living in the end times?" And just because things do not socially agree or measure-up with *OUR* religious, moral, political, and social aesthetic, this does not mean we are in the end times. Nonetheless, we as Christians look at the world through an apocalyptic lens, assume its evil, and in turn, we the church isolate ourselves from the world and we want no parts of that apocalyptic evil that is taking place out there. We isolate because we seem to not want to tarnish our righteous aesthetic nor our faith in a godless society.

Sadly, when we feel the need to isolate ourselves, our faith, and even the church from the world, we merely show that our so-called righteousness along with our understanding of our faith are already tarnished from our self-centered ideals and expectations. This is unfortunately how we react to the prophetic instructions from Jesus within our Gospel. The instructions from Jesus are not apocalyptic, they are a call to discipleship.

Jesus is asking the disciples and us if we are willing to testify to the Gospel in the face of persecution or are we simply going to roll up our sidewalks and call it a day? Our self-centered ideals and expectations of Christian ethics and our faith are the "temples" that we build and shape with our views, our personal history, and our beliefs, and norms. As these people of faith, we then make choices that are centered in our context and our concept of faith, and we constantly try to improve ourselves accordingly in order to acquire value, happiness, and control...and this is why we may think the world, our government, and our society must be Christian-centered so that we can prove or measure our righteousness by our standards. And when the world no longer lines up to our concepts about God and our faith in God, well then, the world must be going astray and our "temples" are threatened or we assume they are being destroyed, and we must be in the end-times.

Our faith along with our understanding of God are the huge stones that we have hued from our history, our norms, and our distorted understanding about faith and stacked atop one another to form the glorious temples that house and protect ourselves and our god from the evilness of the world. We then assume God will find favor in our initiative, but this is what Jesus says will be thrown down. But the Bible says "God helps those who help themselves." This familiar phrase proves my point, no, the Bible does not say this, it originated in ancient Greek tales and fables and was thought to be one of Aesop's fables and later used by Ben Franklyn. But it is not just the world or our current culture that we feel is destroying our church, we think the church ought to be the answer to all the world and the culture's ills...and when the church does not, we are quick to say that the church is dying or that God is dead.

The question that is put before us within this Gospel text today is this, is the church simply a fortress of large hued stones that is here to offer solutions to *my* problems in a way that is favorable for *me*? Is the church simply a fortress of large hued stones that keeps me safe from the world and reinforces my norms and my values? All the questions about the state of our culture, our church,

and even ourselves in the context of faith...all of our questions about the goodness of these things are impossible unless we have first posed the question of the goodness of God.¹

Our Christian faith, our Christian understanding, or our Christian ethic or piety is not the reality of one's own self, nor the reality of the world, nor is it based on or the reality of the norms and values we have built and consider our temples. Our Christian faith, our Christian understanding, or our Christian ethic or piety is centered in God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and not centered in us. In Jesus Christ we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of this world *at the same time* and not one without the other. *The reality of God is truly revealed to us when we are totally emersed in the reality of the world...*because it is within this world that we see God's true grace given in Jesus Christ. And the temples we build from the realities we hold dear to what we assume keeps us safe from the world, we are only keeping ourselves from the reality of God as seen in Jesus Christ in the world.

We may not like what we see in the world, but the world is a mirror of who we truly are...it's not them out there," it's me, it's you, and it's us...we are all the reality of the world, and so is God in Jesus Christ. But the world and all that we claim is evil is who God has reconciled to Himself in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God has entered into the reality of this world, no matter what we think of it, and God has reconciled the world and each of us in here and all those out there, God has reconciled us all in Jesus Christ. As we participate and partake in Jesus Christ we stand at the same time in the reality of God and the reality of the world. The reality of Jesus Christ embraces the reality of the world...warts and all.² And Jesus embraces the world by redeeming the world.

In his book *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke directly to the question of whether the task of the church is to offer solutions to the world for its problems. Bonhoeffer wrote:

It is necessary to free oneself from the way of thinking which sets out from human problems and which asks for solutions on this basis. Such thinking is unbiblical. The way of Jesus Christ, and therefore the way of all Christian thinking, leads not from the world to God but from God to the world. This means the essence of the gospel does not lie in the solution of human problems, and that the solution of human problems cannot be the essential task of the church.³

Bonhoeffer goes on to say:

The message of the church to the world can be none other than the Word of God to the world. This Word is: Jesus Christ, and salvation in this name. We do not know any other relationship of God to the world apart from Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church, too, has no relationship to the world other than through Jesus Christ. This means that the proper relationship of the church to the world does not derive from some natural law, or law of reason, or universal human rights, but solely from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴

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In this, we have built for ourselves a standard in which all others are to be judged...in other words, we build God in our image and all others are judged accordingly. We adorn the structures we've built with all that we deem as good and right so that our god may sit and admire us while we sit safely protected from the culture and the world. We build our temples with the stones of our assumptions and false promises and adorn those temples with all our self-appointed and self-assured glory and we hide away from the world within them and judge the world accordingly. We have with our efforts built glorious temples not of stone and marvelous architecture but of assumptions, deceitful rhetoric, judgment, and false insincere hope. We have built these structures very well with the notion that after the others in the world, out there have fallen, we assume our "temple" will be the one that remains standing. I go back to Bonhoeffer's refute of this when he said, "The way of all Christian thinking, leads not from the world to God but from God to the world."

Here is the very difficult part of the Good News today that we are really uncomfortable with. No matter how good we think we are when compared to the world out there, it has no bearing on salvation and the salvation given to us through Jesus Christ is the same salvation for those out there also who sin just like we do. The world's salvation, like each of ours, comes through the choice God made for all in Jesus Christ.

Today, we do not gather to protect ourselves in here from the world out there, nor do we gather to revel in the spectacular, or the awesomeness of all we have built up for ourselves and present to God. NO, at the center of this gathering is Jesus Christ...the incarnate Word of God, an ordinary way for us to observe, to study, and to attempt to understand God in our world. But if we look closely...really look and take notice, we see that Jesus came into this world as a vulnerable baby to reconcile the world, not just us in here...but the whole world...as sinful as it is. So, when we look closer, we see that Jesus is not a spectacular huge building, he is not a great and mighty warrior...He is a simple piece of bread and sip of wine, He is a Word that says to us all, I am with you always to the end of the age. He is the same Word that in the beginning:

...was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of *all people*. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

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The darkness of this apocalyptic nature that seems to envelop us all is overtaken by God's light known as Jesus Christ. This Word that sits with us today in this gathering is the Word that will tear it all down...but it is the same Word that has reconciled and redeemed us from sin and death, it is the same Word that is put in the hearts of all humankind, and will feed our faith...and it is the Word that will remember our sins and our lawless deeds no more and it is the Word that calls us all into God's glorious presence in His spectacular eternal kingdom...

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Our faith along with our understanding of God are the huge stones that we have hued from our history, our norms, and our distorted understanding about faith and stacked atop one another to form the glorious temples that house and protect ourselves and our god from the evilness of the world. We then assume God will find favor in our initiative, but this is what Jesus says will be thrown down. But the Bible says "God helps those who help themselves." This familiar phrase proves my point, no, the Bible does not say this, it originated in ancient Greek tales and fables and was thought to be one of Aesop's fables and later used by Ben Franklyn. But it is not just the world or our current culture that we feel is destroying our church, we think the church ought to be the answer to all the world and the culture's ills...and when the church does not, we are quick to say that the church is dying or that God is dead.

The question that is put before us within this Gospel text today is this, is the church simply a fortress of large hued stones that is here to offer solutions to *my* problems in a way that is favorable for *me*? Is the church simply a fortress of large hued stones that keeps me safe from the world and reinforces my norms and my values? All the questions about the state of our culture, our church,

and even ourselves in the context of faith...all of our questions about the goodness of these things are impossible unless we have first posed the question of the goodness of God.¹

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In his book *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke directly to the question of whether the task of the church is to offer solutions to the world for its problems. Bonhoeffer wrote:

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Our faith along with our understanding of God are the huge stones that we have hued from our history, our norms, and our distorted understanding about faith and stacked atop one another to form the glorious temples that house and protect ourselves and our god from the evilness of the world. We then assume God will find favor in our initiative, but this is what Jesus says will be thrown down. But the Bible says "God helps those who help themselves." This familiar phrase proves my point, no, the Bible does not say this, it originated in ancient Greek tales and fables and was thought to be one of Aesop's fables and later used by Ben Franklyn. But it is not just the world or our current culture that we feel is destroying our church, we think the church ought to be the answer to all the world and the culture's ills...and when the church does not, we are quick to say that the church is dying or that God is dead.

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and even ourselves in the context of faith...all of our questions about the goodness of these things are impossible unless we have first posed the question of the goodness of God.¹

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In his book *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke directly to the question of whether the task of the church is to offer solutions to the world for its problems. Bonhoeffer wrote:

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in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, in our Prayer of the Day, we pray for steadfast faith amidst the tumult of the world. We are praying this because our appointed prayer of the day is centered on our lessons that seem to have an apocalyptic air about them, especially our Gospel. From that apocalyptic fear of all the so-called evil we perceive to be happening in the world today, I've been asked more than once, "Pastor, are we living in the end times?" And just because things do not socially agree or measure-up with *OUR* religious, moral, political, and social aesthetic, this does not mean we are in the end times. Nonetheless, we as Christians look at the world through an apocalyptic lens, assume its evil, and in turn, we the church isolate ourselves from the world and we want no parts of that apocalyptic evil that is taking place out there. We isolate because we seem to not want to tarnish our righteous aesthetic nor our faith in a godless society.

Sadly, when we feel the need to isolate ourselves, our faith, and even the church from the world, we merely show that our so-called righteousness along with our understanding of our faith are already tarnished from our self-centered ideals and expectations. This is unfortunately how we react to the prophetic instructions from Jesus within our Gospel. The instructions from Jesus are not apocalyptic, they are a call to discipleship.

Jesus is asking the disciples and us if we are willing to testify to the Gospel in the face of persecution or are we simply going to roll up our sidewalks and call it a day? Our self-centered ideals and expectations of Christian ethics and our faith are the "temples" that we build and shape with our views, our personal history, and our beliefs, and norms. As these people of faith, we then make choices that are centered in our context and our concept of faith, and we constantly try to improve ourselves accordingly in order to acquire value, happiness, and control...and this is why we may think the world, our government, and our society must be Christian-centered so that we can prove or measure our righteousness by our standards. And when the world no longer lines up to our concepts about God and our faith in God, well then, the world must be going astray and our "temples" are threatened or we assume they are being destroyed, and we must be in the end-times.

Our faith along with our understanding of God are the huge stones that we have hued from our history, our norms, and our distorted understanding about faith and stacked atop one another to form the glorious temples that house and protect ourselves and our god from the evilness of the world. We then assume God will find favor in our initiative, but this is what Jesus says will be thrown down. But the Bible says "God helps those who help themselves." This familiar phrase proves my point, no, the Bible does not say this, it originated in ancient Greek tales and fables and was thought to be one of Aesop's fables and later used by Ben Franklyn. But it is not just the world or our current culture that we feel is destroying our church, we think the church ought to be the answer to all the world and the culture's ills...and when the church does not, we are quick to say that the church is dying or that God is dead.

The question that is put before us within this Gospel text today is this, is the church simply a fortress of large hued stones that is here to offer solutions to *my* problems in a way that is favorable for *me*? Is the church simply a fortress of large hued stones that keeps me safe from the world and reinforces my norms and my values? All the questions about the state of our culture, our church,

and even ourselves in the context of faith...all of our questions about the goodness of these things are impossible unless we have first posed the question of the goodness of God.¹

Our Christian faith, our Christian understanding, or our Christian ethic or piety is not the reality of one's own self, nor the reality of the world, nor is it based on or the reality of the norms and values we have built and consider our temples. Our Christian faith, our Christian understanding, or our Christian ethic or piety is centered in God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and not centered in us. In Jesus Christ we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of this world *at the same time* and not one without the other. *The reality of God is truly revealed to us when we are totally emersed in the reality of the world...*because it is within this world that we see God's true grace given in Jesus Christ. And the temples we build from the realities we hold dear to what we assume keeps us safe from the world, we are only keeping ourselves from the reality of God as seen in Jesus Christ in the world.

We may not like what we see in the world, but the world is a mirror of who we truly are...it's not them out there," it's me, it's you, and it's us...we are all the reality of the world, and so is God in Jesus Christ. But the world and all that we claim is evil is who God has reconciled to Himself in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God has entered into the reality of this world, no matter what we think of it, and God has reconciled the world and each of us in here and all those out there, God has reconciled us all in Jesus Christ. As we participate and partake in Jesus Christ we stand at the same time in the reality of God and the reality of the world. The reality of Jesus Christ embraces the reality of the world...warts and all.² And Jesus embraces the world by redeeming the world.

In his book *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke directly to the question of whether the task of the church is to offer solutions to the world for its problems. Bonhoeffer wrote:

It is necessary to free oneself from the way of thinking which sets out from human problems and which asks for solutions on this basis. Such thinking is unbiblical. The way of Jesus Christ, and therefore the way of all Christian thinking, leads not from the world to God but from God to the world. This means the essence of the gospel does not lie in the solution of human problems, and that the solution of human problems cannot be the essential task of the church.³

Bonhoeffer goes on to say:

The message of the church to the world can be none other than the Word of God to the world. This Word is: Jesus Christ, and salvation in this name. We do not know any other relationship of God to the world apart from Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church, too, has no relationship to the world other than through Jesus Christ. This means that the proper relationship of the church to the world does not derive from some natural law, or law of reason, or universal human rights, but solely from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴

¹ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6, Ethics. Translated from the German Edition, Edited by Ilse Tödt, Heinz Eduard Tödt, Ernst Feil, and Clifford Green, English Edition Edited by Clifford Green, Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Chares C. West, and Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005. "Christ, Reality, and Good. Christ, Church, and World." Page 49, par 33.*

² *Ibid*, pages 53-64. This paragraph is not directly quoted but it is heavily influenced with what Bonhoeffer is saying about the reality of God in our broken culture.

³ *Ibid*, page 356, par 358.

⁴ *Ibid*, page 356, par 358.

What Bonhoeffer is saying is that the Bible is NOT our instruction manual, rather it is telling us about God and how God works in our life through that Word found in that Bible that is Jesus Christ. Today in our Gospel, the disciples' amazement at the splendor of the temple sparks the apocalyptic comments of Jesus. But instead of seeing God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ in the "end-times," we turn our vision to blame on the world...we then assume that God will accept us our assumptions, support them, and bolster us against the culture and the world that we have shielded ourselves and our faith from. In our view, we then come before God as sufferers or victims rather than the evildoers or victimizers we really are. We are not faithful witnesses in suffering, we just like feeling sorry for ourselves and dislike being hated even more.⁵

In this, we have built for ourselves a standard in which all others are to be judged...in other words, we build God in our image and all others are judged accordingly. We adorn the structures we've built with all that we deem as good and right so that our god may sit and admire us while we sit safely protected from the culture and the world. We build our temples with the stones of our assumptions and false promises and adorn those temples with all our self-appointed and self-assured glory and we hide away from the world within them and judge the world accordingly. We have with our efforts built glorious temples not of stone and marvelous architecture but of assumptions, deceitful rhetoric, judgment, and false insincere hope. We have built these structures very well with the notion that after the others in the world, out there have fallen, we assume our "temple" will be the one that remains standing. I go back to Bonhoeffer's refute of this when he said, "The way of all Christian thinking, leads not from the world to God but from God to the world."

Here is the very difficult part of the Good News today that we are really uncomfortable with. No matter how good we think we are when compared to the world out there, it has no bearing on salvation and the salvation given to us through Jesus Christ is the same salvation for those out there also who sin just like we do. The world's salvation, like each of ours, comes through the choice God made for all in Jesus Christ.

Today, we do not gather to protect ourselves in here from the world out there, nor do we gather to revel in the spectacular, or the awesomeness of all we have built up for ourselves and present to God. NO, at the center of this gathering is Jesus Christ...the incarnate Word of God, an ordinary way for us to observe, to study, and to attempt to understand God in our world. But if we look closely...really look and take notice, we see that Jesus came into this world as a vulnerable baby to reconcile the world, not just us in here...but the whole world...as sinful as it is. So, when we look closer, we see that Jesus is not a spectacular huge building, he is not a great and mighty warrior...He is a simple piece of bread and sip of wine, He is a Word that says to us all, I am with you always to the end of the age. He is the same Word that in the beginning:

...was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of *all people*.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
(John 1:1-5)

⁵ YouTube. David Yeago's Chapel Sermon at Trinity School for Ministry on Reformation Day, dated online as November 7, 2019.

The darkness of this apocalyptic nature that seems to envelop us all is overtaken by God's light known as Jesus Christ. This Word that sits with us today in this gathering is the Word that will tear it all down...but it is the same Word that has reconciled and redeemed us from sin and death, it is the same Word that is put in the hearts of all humankind, and will feed our faith...and it is the Word that will remember our sins and our lawless deeds no more and it is the Word that calls us all into God's glorious presence in His spectacular eternal kingdom...

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.