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Isaiah 65:17-25

"Predictions"

Luke 21:5-19

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 65:17-25

In Exile Isaiah looks to a time when a NEW Jerusalem will come. His prediction is one of hope and promise. His prediction however is not of a return to the Old Jerusalem and a rebuilt temple. It is a vision of a time when the blessings of the Lord will extend to God's children and God's creatures, a time for which we are to work towards knowing ultimately this New Jerusalem will only be realized on the other side of life.

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 21:5-19

We've been following a series of confrontations between Jesus and his adversaries in the Temple. This morning our passage begins with the adversaries sent packing and Jesus is alone in the Temple with his disciples. Their ministry had been in the countryside and they have not spent much time in the Temple. Like tourists on their first trip to Washington D.C. they are awestruck by the magnitude and magnificence of the Temple. Imagine their surprise when Jesus makes a prediction about what is to come.

Let's pray. Oh Lord we are easily impressed. We are impressed at the works of our hands more than the things you spoke into existence. We are distressed when your creation erupts and our works crumble. We reap the fruit of our labor and of our rebellion. Through this your word, help us to see and tend to those things that are eternal, lasting and pleasing to you. Bless to our reading and our hearing of this your word. Amen.

Predictions: meteorologists and bookies make them for a living. They're not always right. Today's Baytown Sun had a cartoon of a wild eyed long white bearded guy in a robe and sandals carrying a sign that said "The End Is Near!" In his trail are a man and a woman. The man says to the woman, "Don't believe it. He used to be a pollster."

Some preachers make a living making predictions. A preacher was recently talking for an hour about his new book that supposedly explained everything we needed to know about the coming of Jesus and the end of time. "You must have this book," he said over and over again, a telephone number (not even toll-free) constantly flashing at the bottom of the TV screen. Seems that he had prophetic insight into world events, and for a mere \$14.95 we could have the benefit of his wisdom. It was inferred that we would not survive the coming terrors unless we had his book. A certain pastor called the number and suggested to the poor operator that if this preacher really thought this was so vital to the survival of the planet, and that the end was so near, he would be giving the book away! I mean; he wouldn't need the money, right? It's all coming to an end anyway. Who would need a bank account? True, it costs money to print, but he will not have to pay for it if it goes as he says. The woman on the other end of the line was not amused. "Sorry, sir," she said, "but I don't know much about theology," to which the pastor responded, "Neither does the writer of the book you're selling."

The end times have been with us ever since Jesus ascended into heaven. The disciples stood drop jawed looking into the sky two men in white robes stood by them. They said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10-11) People have been trying to predict when that would be ever since. The church at Thessalonica thought it would be in their lifetime over 2,000 years ago and quit going to work. Paul had to write them a letter to tell them to get back to work.

Here are some predictions from the past- all from people who were trusted individuals whose predictions were not exactly accurate.

In 1943, Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

In 1949 Popular Mechanics magazine made this prediction: "Where a calculator on the ENIAC is equipped with 18,000 vacuum tubes and weighs 30 tons, computers in the future may have only 1,000 vacuum tubes and weigh only 1.5 tons."

There was an inventor by the name of Lee DeForest. He claimed that "While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially it is an impossibility."

In 1962, the Decca Recording Co. made a big mistake when they made this prediction: "We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out." That was their prediction concerning a few lads from Liverpool. - of course they were predicting about ... the Beatles.

In 2016 the prediction was...Cubs win? Who predicted that? Actually, the movie Back to the Future had the Cubs winning in 2017. But maybe they will win it again next year. Marty McFly didn't travel to 2016. Although.... Sports Illustrated has predicted the Astros will win it in 2017.

Was there anything else happening in 2016 that people were predicting?

Jesus and his disciples had finally arrived in Jerusalem. The disciples were admiring the beauty of the Temple one of the great wonders of the ancient world. It was a massive structure, a tremendous symbol of national pride. During Jesus' day 250,000 people could fit comfortably within the structure. No sports structure in America today comes close in size and splendor to the Temple at Jerusalem and yet, when it was finished, the people wept because it paled in comparison to the original.

The smallest stones in the walls of the massive structure weighed 2 to 3 tons. Many of them weighed 50 tons. The largest existing stone, part of the Wailing Wall, is 40 feet long and 10 feet high, and it weighs hundreds of tons! The stones were so immense that neither mortar nor any other binding material was used between the stones. Their stability was attained by the great weight of the stones. The walls towered over

Jerusalem, over 400 feet high in one area. The Temple was many, many times larger than any building the disciples had ever seen before. They stared at it in amazement.

At this point Jesus makes one of the few specific predictions of his entire ministry. He predicts that this magnificent Temple would one day come falling down. "Not one stone will be left on another;" he said, "every one of them will be thrown down."

Try to place yourself in first century Jerusalem. From anywhere in the city you can look up and catch a glimpse of the Temple. The 45-year project of King Herod was the third such Temple. It had been the center of their national life for a thousand years. In the Temple the Jews sacrificed, confessed their sins, gave their first fruits of the harvest. Yearly they sacrificed a lamb for the nations' sins. It was here that Passover, Pentecost, Day of Atonement, Feasts of Tabernacles, and Feast of Weeks was celebrated. The Temple was the place where John's birth was announced, where Jesus' preeminence was recognized by Simeon and Anna, where Jesus' religious intelligence was recognized by the leaders at age 12, and where the money changers were driven out years later. It was here that Paul was arrested. With the Temple so central to life how would they worship God without it?

In 70 A.D. the Temple did come down as Jesus predicted it would. Titus, a Roman general, with 80,000 men, set siege to Jerusalem. It was a difficult city to take, set on a hill, and defended to the death. When the siege was successful and the city was taken, Titus ordered the whole city and the Temple to be razed to the ground. Josephus, the historian, who was actually there, tells us that 97,000 residents of the city were taken captive and enslaved and that more than one million died.

All that remains of the temple now is a portion of a retaining wall, called the western wall or the Wailing Wall. The Wailing Wall, of course, is the most holy prayer spot for present-day Jews. When I visited Israel in 1994 I was privileged to be able to go behind the Wailing Wall and see the enormity of the foundation stones up close. (2)

When Jesus predicted that the Temple would be destroyed the disciples wanted to know when. What would be the sign that it was about to happen?

Jesus had no use for those who were continually looking for signs. He warned them that many false prophets would come in his name seeking to lead them astray. He warned them that there would be wars and rebellions and famines and plagues and earthquakes and plagues.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. He could be talking about our time. Friends, he could be talking about any time in recorded history. There have always been wars and rumors of wars. There have always been "earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places." The future has always been uncertain for every generation of humanity.

Jesus wanted his disciples to know that things could get very tough. They would be arrested and persecuted. They would be betrayed by friends and family and be hated and put to death. By this time, the disciples were probably regretting saying anything about the Temple. Then Jesus does a complete reversal.

He speaks these comforting words, "But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life."

Jesus is telling his disciples and he is telling us, the future is filled with uncertainties. We certainly have our uncertainties. Will Social Security run out of money? That may seem like a trivial concern compared to the persecution that the early Christians faced, thrown into gladiator pits, burned at the stake, crucified. Social Security may not be in the same class with those kinds of torturous deaths, but that doesn't change the fact that a great many seniors in our land depend upon it. What will the stock market do? Recessions are just as much a part of capitalism as is profit and loss. It's not a matter of whether it will happen, but when. And will we again be able to prevent falling into a depression?

Will there be another major terrorist attack? It seems almost certain there will be of some kind. It would be most unlikely that we can stop every single mad bomber, or groups of mad bombers in the world, forever. On this, the Sunday after Veterans Day we are mourning the loss of two U.S. service members who were among the four people killed and 14 injured in an explosion inside Bagram Airfield, a large U.S. base north of Afghanistan, killed by a suicide bomber.

Last night I attended a fund raiser at the VFW Hall for Ken Pridgeon's effort to paint portraits of fallen soldiers for their families. There were 3 Gold Star families present to receive a portrait of their sons. In another room there was a display of all the soldiers who lost their lives in the course of their duty since World War II. There were photos of all the soldiers from Texas who have made that ultimate sacrifice.

No matter what is happening in the world, there are uncertainties in our own lives. What will your next doctor's report say? Does a tragic automobile accident lay waiting for someone you love? I don't mean to alarm you, but life is still unpredictable, just as it was when the disciples asked Jesus when the Temple would fall. Our future is filled with uncertainty. Life is unpredictable...in a world filled and filling with ...predictions.

When Jesus warned his disciples that they would be persecuted. He predicted, "Yes you will be arrested. The result is that you will be witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."

Now, most of us will never go to court over the fact that we are Christians. But all of us will have adversaries of some kind. All of us will have dark nights of the soul sooner or later. We will have fears, we will have doubts, life will turn against us. What Christ reminds us that whatever kind of situation we find ourselves in, he is with us. We are not alone and God's grace is sufficient regardless of how difficult life may be. It is vital that we keep our mind fixed on that truth.

Over the centuries people have made calculations and predictions, sold or given away all their belongings, and gathered at appointed places to wait for the end of the world and for Jesus to return. Obviously, the world has not yet come to an end and Jesus has not returned.

Still, we wait. We look around at the world in which we live filled with violence and crime and racial tension. We read about child abuse, spouse abuse, senior abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and we say, "Things just can't keep on going the way they're going." Times of uncertainty and crisis trigger thoughts about the end of time.

In times of persecution, in times of suffering, in times when our world seems to be crumbling, in times of our greatest need, we will receive strength from beyond ourselves. That strength comes from God. Jesus warns the disciples that the days ahead will be difficult. But they are not alone. And neither are we. I liked one sign I saw that said, "I will not accept the things I cannot change. I will work to change the things that I cannot accept."

Rabbi Harold Kushner reflects on this strength. "I have seen weak people become strong," he writes, "timid people become brave, selfish people become generous. I have seen people care for their elderly parents, for brain damaged children, for wives in wheelchairs, for years, even decades, and I have asked myself, where do people get the strength to keep doing that for so long? Where do they get the resources of love and loyalty to keep going? The only answer I come up with is when we are weary and out of strength, we turn to God and God renews our strength, so we can run and not grow weary, so that we can walk and not feel faint." (3)

We live in a very confusing and, it seems at times, broken world. We live in a world where there is suffering, pain, and sorrow. We live in a world where competing religions threaten to undo our ability to live together in peace. Things are not as they once were. The world is not simple and it is not innocent. The days of Leave it to Beaver are not even known to our current generation. Those days never were. It was a TV show!

Our young people today know only a world where terrorism and indifference pervade. They have every right to question where history is going.

Jill Duffield, the editor of Presbyterian Outlook wrote this week, "We must find a way to live together - not just in tolerance, but in the perfect love that casts out fear. Now is our opportunity to testify and we better pray to proclaim the gospel with boldness and clarity. (This morning's Baytown Sun carried an article from our own Lanie Garrett calling for clarity in our communication with each other) We better pray to preach it relentlessly, fearlessly and authentically.

We need to stop admiring the stones of the temple and start following the One who turns them upside down, not leaving one unturned, until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

Now is our opportunity to testify. Now is our opportunity to speak the gospel to the brokenhearted. Now is our opportunity to speak the truth in love. Now is our opportunity to let the world know we are Christ's disciples by our love for one another in a very unloving and too often unlovely world. Now is our opportunity to testify to the power of Jesus Christ to reconcile and forgive, to transform and redeem.

Consider all the tumult, the war, the earthquakes, the suffering and the cruelty. Does not God have a Word to say in the midst of it? Have we not been given a purpose to fulfill in the face of it? Are we not to be a light to the world? Didn't Jesus ask, "Do you love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know that we love you." "Tend my sheep." Now is our opportunity to testify.

The stones are coming down. Not one will be left standing. The middle won't hold. Like the curtain torn in two, our communities have been split apart by highways built through neighborhoods, and gerrymandered districts carved out so politicians can choose their voters instead of voters choosing their representatives, and prison populations that keep families apart for years, if not forever.

In the wake of this election there will be many who say the end is near, all is lost, now what? Now is the opportunity for us to testify to the gospel and to the God who longs for What Isaiah predicted—"to build houses and inhabit them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit and enjoy the work of their hands

Beware you aren't lead astray. Don't give in to the narrative of destruction for destruction's sake. Remember Jesus says that the temple that is destroyed will be raised in three days. The Son of God, dead and buried, will be raised on the third day. Destruction, death, enmity and strife will come to an end. Our God is the God of peace, not of chaos. Imagine. Testify. Pray. Speak the words the Spirit gives with boldness. Hebrews 10:39 says, "We are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved" 3

There are many in our world who have felt left out. There are many who fear being pushed out. Our calling as followers of Jesus is to reach out to bring in the left out and hold on to those being threatened of being pushed out.

The poet and activist Alice Walker asked in the wake of the election, "Do we turn on others, or towards others?" We believe turning towards one another is the calling of our faith. 4

We know that Jesus' words in verse 18 cannot mean that Jesus' followers will not be harmed by their enemies. Some of them we know, were beaten, thrown in jail, and killed. But Jesus affirms for us that the ultimate security of his disciples is in God's hands. The people who persecuted the disciples and other Christians in the early years of the church failed to understand that in the end, God will usher in the New Jerusalem that Isaiah envisioned. That is why we can take great comfort in Jesus' words, "By your endurance you will gain your souls." Now is our time to testify. Now is our time to persevere and to endure. I look forward to experiencing firsthand the realization of that...prediction. The END has always been Near.

Let us pray, Lord, you know that we live in a great and awful time. You have opened our minds to the secrets of nature, placed in our hands the power of the atom, and allowed us to explore the heavens. Through human skill the earth yields an abundance

of food. Through the marvels of medicine our earthly span is extended beyond our parents. We bow in humble thanksgiving and acknowledge your grace by which we survive.

As generations before us pled for your mercy, so we today entreat your goodness. We pray for modesty as we inhabit the earth's surface. Save us from destroying such a beautiful home. Endow our leaders with wisdom and a love of creation. Fill them with zeal for peace to match their obsession for defense. Help us to be more faithful stewards of the resources you provide. Replace greed with a gracious sharing of our abundance. As in Jesus you came to show your love for the world so through him we pray that the world you love may be saved for future generations. Buildings come and buildings go. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord will stand forever. Amen.

- 1 ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., Comments and Observations, by Scott Hoezee
- 2 ChristianGlobe Network, Collected Sermons, by Brett Blair
3. Jill Duffield, Looking Into the Lectionary. Presbyterian Outlook
4. Taken from a Pastoral Letter Fourth Presbyterian Church, 126 E. Chestnut, Chicago, Illinois, 60611.2014 www.fourthchurch.org Pastor Shannon Kershner.