

“Our Bodies, Our Temples”

**Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
Sunday, November 10, 2013**

**Old Testament Lesson – Psalm 98
New Testament Lesson – Luke 21:5-6, 12-19**

In 1945, Seaman Kim Malthé-Bruun was executed for resisting the Nazis. He wrote this farewell letter to his mother:

Dear Mother:

Today, together with Jorgen, Nils, and Ludwig, I was arraigned before a Military Tribunal. We were condemned to death. I know that you are a courageous woman, and that you will bear this, but, hear me, it is not enough to bear it, you must also understand it. I am an insignificant thing, and my person will soon be forgotten, but the thought, the life, the inspiration that filled me will live on. You will meet them everywhere – in the trees at springtime, in people who cross your path, in a loving little smile. You will encounter that something which perhaps had value in me, you will cherish it and you will not forget me.

And so I shall have a chance to grow, to become large and mature. I shall be living with all of you whose hearts I once filled... In haste – Your eldest child and only son, Kim¹

Here's a young man facing death. How does he do it so bravely; with such confidence and conviction about what can only be called eternal life? “I shall have a chance to grow,” he writes, “to become large and mature. I shall be living with all of you whose hearts I once filled....”

I can't tell you where this comes from for this young man. But I do know that we all have access to this same level of courage, confidence and conviction, when we stand strong and stay focused on our faith in Jesus Christ.

In today's New Testament Lesson, Jesus' disciples pause to marvel at the temple in Jerusalem, the holiest, most beautiful structure on the face of the earth, the very dwelling place of God.

And Jesus says to them, ‘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.’ How can Jesus point to the dwelling place of God and declare that it will be torn down? Unless of course, the temple in Jerusalem is not the dwelling place of God, at least not exclusively.

Jesus, as God incarnate – God embodied – is teaching his disciples – teaching us – that there is something beyond the limitations and confinements that we experience as human beings, something beyond even death and decay and destruction. “By your endurance,” says Jesus, “you will gain your souls.”

¹ Retrieved Nov. 6, 2013, from www.homileticsonline.com

The Greek word for soul is [psychē](#), which means “life, spirit, or consciousness.” It comes from a verb meaning “to cool” or “to blow.” So really, Jesus is referring here not just to life, but to the very breath of God that gives us life. That’s what we stand to gain.

Even amid death and decay and destruction, we have access to a life-giving spirit through Jesus Christ, if we stand firm in the faith, no matter what life throws at us. Listen to what the disciples faced, as foretold and described by Jesus:

“Before all this occurs (before the temple of the Lord is torn down and left to decay), 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....” “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death....”

How can we relate to this teaching? Nowadays, we don’t have a temple theology – a belief that God dwells exclusively in churches, synagogues, mosques or any other holy places. In fact, because of the teachings of Jesus, ours is an incarnate theology – the belief that God dwells within us and within all creation.

We see this most vividly in another of the gospel accounts, in the Gospel According to John, where Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” to which the religious leaders answer, “This temple has been under construction for 46 years, and will you raise it up in three days?” And that’s when John opens up this teaching for us by noting, Jesus “was speaking of the temple of his body.”

If we think of our bodies as a temple, then it becomes easier to relate to the warnings Jesus gives to his disciples. Jesus foretells of arrest and persecution, being handed over to higher authorities, betrayal, and death. When we get sick or near death, and even as we age, it can feel like being arrested or stopped short, no longer able to go where we want. Illness and aging can feel like persecution, like outside forces are working against us, medical authorities taking over our lives. And some of us even face the betrayal of parents, siblings, relatives and friends, as mounting pressures strain our closest relationships. Where is the hope in all of that?

Three women were discussing the struggles of getting older. One of them said, “Sometimes I catch myself standing in front of the refrigerator with a jar of mayonnaise in my hand and I can’t remember whether I need to put it away or make sandwich.”

The second lady chimed in, saying, “Yes, sometimes I find myself on the landing of the stairs and can’t remember whether I was on my way up or on my way down.”

The third one responded, “Well, ladies, I’m glad I don’t have that problem, knock on wood,” as she rapped her knuckles on the table. Then she said, “That must be the door; I’ll get it!”

We can’t stop the process of aging, and certainly we can’t stop death and dying. But what we can do, is understand that this is not the end. And that not even death gets the final word for those who have faith in Jesus Christ. And in that

knowledge and faith, we can even have a little fun with the aging process and see a glimpse of hope even in the midst of death.

Jesus teaches us how to stand up against such terrible and destructive forces, like when our health fails us, when illness is working against us, when life's struggles damage our closest relationships.

Jesus tells us that this can and will happen, and in doing so, he is telling us to **live with readiness and awareness** – not worry, but readiness and awareness. Rather than living in denial on the one hand or worry on the other, Jesus asks us to instead trust in him. “Make up your minds,” says Jesus, “not to prepare your defense in advance...” – don't worry – “... for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.”

In other words, if we stand strong and stay focused on our faith, Jesus will see us through. And in that assurance, we can live with our eyes wide open and our hearts at peace, confident in God's love and protection.

And that's not all. We not only have the assurance that God will see us through our toughest and darkest moments, but that even in these moments, God is working through us.

“This will give you an opportunity to testify,” says Jesus. Our struggles in life are actually opportunities to **show those without hope that there is hope**, hope in Jesus Christ – hope and certainty in the promise of our faith that, as Jesus says, “Not a hair of your head will perish.”

But wait a minute. How can Jesus say “they will put some of you to death..., but not a hair of your head will perish”? Jesus can say this because faith in Christ does not mean that bad things won't happen to us – even serious things, like illness and death. Rather, it means that when we face the worst of life, we still have **the assurance of God's love and protection**. And in that promise, there is freedom and peace and joy. “By your endurance you will gain your souls.” Jesus' vision for us as God's beloved children cannot be contained by the limitations and confinements that we experience as human beings.

When we stand strong and stay focused on our faith in Jesus Christ, it's just as the Apostle Paul says in Romans, “neither death nor life, neither messenger of Heaven nor monarch of earth, neither what happens today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

And what Jesus is telling us is, for us to tap into that divine promise, all we have to do to, when trouble hits, is to leave the world behind -let go of its limitations and concerns- and turn exclusively to Him. It's as easy – and as hard – as that. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy God and author of our hope, thank you for the assurance of your presence and grace.

We pour out before you our concerns for the world. We are grieved by our capacity for inhumanity towards one another – for the hatred and greed that fuels war, for the selfishness and callousness that perpetuates inequities, for the deaf ear and blind eye that keep us comfortable while so many suffer.

We are overwhelmed by the needs of this world, particularly in the face of tragic events like the typhoon that struck in the Philippines – needs for clean drinking water, food and shelter, access to basic medical care.

We feel helpless in the face of self-made tragedies, like human trafficking, the exploitation of children, and refugee camps on the borders of countries far away.

Speak to us, we pray, in the midst of our brokenness. We long for the healing of our planet, we cling to our hope in you, and we ask for valiant courage as we seek to respond to the hurting world around us, as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Help us to know and receive God's love and protection as sent forth to us and to all the world through the prayer we are about pray, the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.