

Luke 19:41–48 (Trinity X)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
August 21, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Today, on the tenth Sunday after Trinity, the Church focuses especially on the destruction of Jerusalem. If you've ever paged through the back of old Lutheran hymnals, you might have stumbled across a brief summary of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This summary is based on the writings of Josephus, a Roman-Jewish military leader who lived at that time. The summary of Jerusalem's destruction was to be read at Vespers, the evening service, on the tenth Sunday after Trinity. It shows the fulfillment in history of what Jesus said in today's Gospel lesson when He wept over Jerusalem: "the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear down to the ground, you and your children with you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation." Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem that came 40 years later, and He wept over it.

But Trinity X and the destruction of Jerusalem are not just about remembering an important part of world history. The destruction of Jerusalem teaches us what all destruction teaches us, according to Jesus, that "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). The destruction of Jerusalem is a warning to nations and people against rejecting God's Word and promises, to take heed lest we fall (1 Cor 10:12). But the destruction of Jerusalem is also about the true Temple, the body of Jesus, which remains into all eternity and can never be destroyed. Though all earthly temples be destroyed, Jesus lives forever. Here in the body of Christ we have access to God the Father, now and forever.

Reading both the New Testament and especially historical accounts from the time, you can quickly see how unpopular the Jews and the Romans were to each other. The Jews were a culture unto themselves with ambitions to throw off the Roman shackles. You can see the conflict in the New Testament. Zealots were prepared to fight to the death. The religious rulers were prepared to sacrifice principles to appease the Romans. Pontius Pilate was willing to let Jesus be crucified to prevent an uprising (Mark 15:14; John 19:8). The environment was tense, and it only got worse. In A.D. 66, around the time of St. Paul's death, the First Jewish-Roman War began. What started as anti-taxation protests turned into rioting and bloodshed. Emperor Nero sent General Vespasian to quell the disturbance. Soon Vespasian himself became emperor and sent his son, Titus, to take Jerusalem. The siege lasted seven months. Pestilence and famine fell upon the city. The starving population began eating leather shoes, saddles, and belts. Then they turned to hay and manure. And finally, to give you the sense of how unimaginably horrible the situation was, Josephus even tells us about a mother who ate half of her infant child and offered the leftovers to starving soldiers.

In Deuteronomy 28[:52–53], the people of Israel were warned about the curses to come upon those who do not listen to God's Word and keep His commandments. Part of the curse includes that a foreign people "shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land, which the LORD your God has given you. And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you." All this came to fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which Jesus had in mind as He wept over Jerusalem on His way to the cross.

On the surface it might seem like Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed because of Jewish conflict with the Romans. This is only partially true. From Scripture, we know that there is a deeper spiritual cause for the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus says: “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. . . you did not know the time of your visitation.” Jerusalem was destroyed because the Jewish people did not recognize the source of true peace, Jesus Christ. The Jewish people did not recognize the time of their visitation, that it was the Lord Himself in human vesture standing in their midst.

In Isaiah 9, Jesus is called the “prince of peace.” When He was born, the angels sang: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased” (Luke 2:14). True peace comes in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. In Jesus Christ God reconciles to Himself all things, “whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross” (Col 1:20). Jesus came to make peace between God and man by dying on the cross for our sins, and from that peace with God flows peace with those around us. This peace in Jesus Christ is a peace that passes all understanding (Phil 4:7). But the people of Israel did not know the things that make for peace. They rejected the prince of peace. The Lord God of Israel visited and redeemed His people. He came to guide their feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:68, 79), yet they rejected Him and crucified the Lord of glory. That’s why Jerusalem was destroyed. When God’s Word is rejected, destruction is soon to follow.

In 1525, a sermon by Martin Luther on this text was printed, entitled: “A Sermon on the Destruction of Jerusalem. In like Manner will Germany also be destroyed, if she will not recognize the time of her visitation. What the Temple of God is.” Basically Luther says that now because of the Reformation, the Gospel again had free course in Germany, but if the people

rejected it, Germany would be destroyed, just like Israel. Luther says that “the clearer the Word is preached the greater the punishment will be” when that Word is rejected, even if that punishment takes a hundred years to come. One hundred years after Luther preached this sermon, Germany was ravished by the Thirty Years’ War, which brought with it similar atrocities to those described in the destruction of Jerusalem. When God’s Word is neglected or rejected, destruction is inevitable. When the peace of God is rejected and God’s gracious visitation ignored, violence is all that’s left. That’s the lesson we learn from the destruction of Jerusalem, a lesson for all times and places, a lesson and a warning for us too. Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

This lesson of repentance was also preached by the Apostles in the first generation of the Church. In his Pentecost sermon, after preaching on the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Apostle Peter said: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” When the Jews listening to Peter heard this, “they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.’” About three thousand souls were added to the Church that day.

What we learn here is that even after the people’s rejection of our LORD and His promises, our God remains faithful. Even when God’s people forsake Him, our LORD is merciful and does everything He can to draw us back to Himself. The Jews who crucified Jesus are the same Jews who then repented of their sin, turned back to God, and were baptized for the

remission of their sins. Temporal punishment came for rejecting the Messiah, but in the midst of that temporal punishment our LORD continues working to lead us back to Himself.

We also have to understand, however, that the Holy City, Jerusalem, and the temple were destroyed not just because Israel was unfaithful. Jerusalem and the Temple were ultimately destroyed because with the coming of Jesus they were no longer necessary. The city of Jerusalem was only a sign of the true Jerusalem to come. The temple made with hands was only a sign pointing to the true Temple, the body of Jesus. Jerusalem was important for the Old Testament people of Israel because Jerusalem is where God dwelt with His people in the temple. There, in the temple, the priests would daily offer sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. But when Jesus came, He said “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” He was speaking about the Temple of His body (John 2:19,21).

The body of Jesus is the true Temple because the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands. The Most High God dwells in the body of Jesus. There, in the flesh of Christ, the sins of the world are atoned for. God no longer counts our sins against us because they were paid for in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. The Great High Priest has completely covered our sins. And so the old temple, the picture, could pass away because in Jesus we have the reality of God’s presence with His people. In the blood of Jesus we have the reality of atonement and access to God the Father. The old has passed away. The new has come.

In Baptism, dear Christian, you are united to the body of Jesus. As Peter says, “you yourselves, like living stones you are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). You are united to the Temple, and so you become a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). You are united to the

Great High priest, and so you, too, intercede for the world as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). In the Lord's Supper you eat God's sacrifice and drink His blood for the forgiveness of your sins. There, too, at the altar, you become one with the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. There He joins Himself with you and where the head is, there will the body be also. You have the hope of resurrection because your Lord and master Jesus Christ, is the firstborn from the dead, and you yourself are united to that true Temple, the body of Jesus Christ.

The body of Christ, the Church, is also the new Jerusalem. In Revelation 21, the Apostle John describes the Church as the Bride, the wife of the Lamb. He sees the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel. John says: "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb." The earthly temple and the earthly Jerusalem were destroyed on account of sin. Anywhere God's Word is rejected, such destruction is imminent. But the earthly temple and the earthly Jerusalem only pointed to the body of Christ. Jesus is the true Temple of God. Jesus is the true city of God. And one day we will join those coming out of the great tribulation, who are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His Temple, where the Lamb on the throne, our Lord Jesus Christ, will shelter us with His presence forever. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.