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## Luke 21: 5-19 – “The time is coming..”

This week we enter the somewhat tricky territory of what is called apocalyptic writing, one of the many different genres of writing we find in our Bibles. The word ‘apocalyptic’ might conjure up images of disaster and destruction in our minds but the original meaning of the word is simply ‘to reveal or to uncover.’

Jesus is uncovering or revealing some of what is to come and attempting to reassure his disciples that, although the future might look bleak, God is not going to be surprised or taken unawares by it, God’s plans are still being worked out. Luke’s listeners are like us in that what is being predicted here by Jesus has already happened in reality by the time they receive this Gospel: the temple has been destroyed.

And as **we** read it, many of the events described by Jesus as being on the way have already happened: nation has risen up against nation, there have been great earthquakes, famines and plagues, followers of Jesus throughout the world have been and continue to be persecuted, imprisoned, betrayed and hated. This is the world in which we live. And it’s all very well for Jesus to say, ‘Do not be terrified’ - turn on any news station to see how terrifying war and insurrection is for those most cruelly affected, namely those most vulnerable, the old, the poor, women and children, people forced to flee their homes and countries, feeling that every day might be their last, many not making it (ending up suffocated in the back of lorries and vans), and many, on arrival somewhere safe, still facing great hardship and hostility.

But this is the Gospel of Christ - it’s good news - and the good news is that, it might be hard to live in the world, and as a Christian in the world, and it isn’t getting any easier, but in cosmic terms, the bigger picture is that ‘not a hair of our head will perish.’ Literally of course this makes little sense since all the hairs on our head, and our whole physical selves will perish, but that will not be the end. As Phil was saying last week, we as Christians have a sure and certain hope of resurrection.

Rewinding just a little: Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem, he has entered the Temple to reclaim it from its corrupt ways, he has, not surprisingly, been kicked out by the temple leadership and has rebuked them in return. Now he announces the destruction of the whole temple and the old world to which it is connected. ***Jesus is tearing down the house*** - isn’t it so satisfying to hear that this is what happens when Jesus is in the building - isn’t it exciting to think that that will happen again? Haven’t we just longed in situations of injustice when we are dealing with pompous, small-minded people, or worse, cruel, apparently heartless people - for Jesus to come in and cut them down to size, turn over the tables of their smug hypocrisy, tear down the whole house...can you tell that I am really looking forward to the day when that will happen...

The Gospel of Luke is written to encourage persecuted people, in fact to encourage people just like us who are struggling to live the way Jesus has taught us, in a world where this is seen as weak and ridiculous. But we shouldn’t be terrified/afraid to continue our efforts - to fill up our bags for Nativitas, to pray for those who hurt and dismiss us, to comfort those who mourn, because we look forward to the scenario described in our other passage today from Isaiah - and it’s so beautiful that I am going to read it again.

### **Isaiah 65:17-25**

65:17 For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

65:18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

65:19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; **no more** shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.

65:20 **No more** shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

65:21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

65:22 They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

65:23 They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD-- and their descendants as well.

65:24 Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

65:25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent--its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Can you picture that day, that scene?

**No more - no more** refugees on boats on the seas, **no more** homeless people sleeping rough in the cold, **no more** people trafficking, **no more** discrimination, **no more, no more...**

And do you think Jesus' words sustained his followers through what happened next, all the things that Jesus predicts which first happen to him and then his church, and then to the rest of us - but always, first, to him?

He is about to be arrested, his friends will betray and deny him, others will bear false witness, he will be beaten, imprisoned, humiliated, tortured and killed...

And so Jesus knows what persecution feels like, imprisonment, betrayal, hatred, and death - he knows because it happened to him first.

I'm pretty sure the disciples will have been so overwhelmed by the arrest and death of Jesus that they forget, as we do when things are tough, that this is not the way things will always be.

By the time Luke's gospel reaches Luke's public, Jesus has died and risen from the dead and the early Church is being persecuted. The two extremes of joy and pain are a daily reality. I want to say that not much has changed since then. We still have to try and hold those two extremes together - until the vision of Isaiah, the vision of Jesus becomes reality.

In our lives we are constantly trying to find a balance, between persecution and resurrection, despair and hope. The challenge is to live in the tension and trust that Jesus is coming back someday - **and when he does he is going to tear down the house.**

Amen.