



Jesus Sees You

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Twenty Third Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 21:1-19

What do you notice?

What do you wonder about?

What jumps out at you?

What doesn't make sense?

When I lead a Bible study – really no matter what is written on the study guide – these are the questions I ask immediately following the reading. Without fail, someone in the group notices something I missed ... or asks a question I never considered ... We are struck by different images or words. We bring different life experiences and insights with us when we open up the Bible. What's happening in our lives & the world influences how we hear. This is part of what makes small group study the Bible so valuable – we walk away with things we never would have come to reading on our own.

Well, this last week – when I asked these question, I got a response or two – but it took a little longer. There were some long silences ... some awkward pauses ... as we sat with those questions and this scripture reading. I mean – there's a lot in here. And much of it is ... how should I say ... well, it's a little dark. Knowing a tiny bit about the background can be really helpful.

You see, in this passage, Jesus is giving a sermon. He is teaching the disciples and other followers using a style that many of us are kind of uncomfortable with. This is apocalyptic literature. Now that's a tricky word to say – so I'm going to teach you the MN version. Apocalyptic. Apocalyptic.

For lots of us, this style is mysterious and difficult to understand. Like the book of Revelation or parts of Daniel. But I assure you, there is great hope in this – we just tend to get distracted by all the lists of terrible things that will happen. Apocalyptic literature



is meant to give us hope and remind us to trust in God when it feels like the world is falling apart around us. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future OR to instill fear in us – but to reassure us of God’s presence in the bleakest of circumstances.

Theologian Dr. Gilberto Ruiz explains it to us this way:

“Apocalyptic literature uses unsettling language and imagery as a means to assure the faithful that they should keep their trust in God even when facing the most challenging of circumstances. Sure enough, while describing the terrible events, Jesus tells his listeners not to be afraid (Luke 21:9).

Okay – so that’s helpful to see what Jesus was doing and why Jesus was saying all these things.

Dr. Ruiz goes on to say:

There is nothing particularly original or specific about Jesus’ ‘predictions’ here. Every age has its own false prophets, wars, natural catastrophes, and so on. We will misread 21:7-11 if we think Jesus is describing a specific set of calamities.

** The point is that when bad things happen – and they will – we should ‘not be terrified’ (21:9) or follow anyone proclaiming these are signs of God’s judgment and the end (21:8). Instead, we should trust that God remains present in our lives.”

Whew With that insight, I feel like the veil has been lifted from the mystery & obscurity of this story in Luke. It was like elephant in the room that no one knew how to address. Reflecting more about the type of sermon Jesus was giving was enlightening. This wisdom helped ME to step back and see and hear what else is going on in this scripture. I hope the same is true for you. I revisited those questions with fresh eyes and ears.

What do you notice?

What do you wonder about?

What jumps out at you?

What doesn’t make sense?

Well, I noticed what was noticed. Let me explain.



The disciples and those gathered to listen to Jesus teaching begin to look around and comment about the temple grounds they were gathered in. They noticed the stonework. They admired how beautiful it was. They remarked on the decorations and the gifts that were on display. And I get it – we’ve all had our minds wonder a bit during a sermon and we watch the light coming in through the windows, or consider the colors or banners or what’s happening with the prism inside the altar cross. [guilty!] This is normal human behavior – it’s was going on even when Jesus was here. Okay? 😊** And we know that the temple court was gigantic and extravagant and that Herod the Great spared no cost in its rebuilding. So I’m sure there was plenty to observe in that space.

I ALSO noticed what Jesus noticed. He does not remark on the adornment of the space at all – really just that it will all come crashing down someday. This sermon begins with him noticing people bringing their offering. He saw rich people putting in their offering and he saw a poor widow putting in her offering. He noticed that she put two small coins into the treasury. And Jesus comments that she gave more generously than the wealthy givers because she wasn’t giving the “extra” or her leftovers, but from the money she actually had to survive.

What really strikes me is the contrast set up here in our story. Those listening to Jesus notice the accomplishments of humans in engineering and extravagantly decorating the temple. Jesus notices the humble actions of an outcast person in worship. The followers notice beauty and adornment – the obvious gifts contributed to this house of God. Jesus notices the invisible generosity of one person who has shared in ways that no one else sees.

We see what sparkles.

Jesus sees the heart.

Jesus knows this woman’s whole story – that she is poor, a widow. Left destitute by a situation in which she had no control. He knows she gave 2 small coins – the equivalent of about \$2.60 today. And Jesus sees this. Commends this. He says she has given more than ALL the WEALTHY folks. It’s remarkable. And he doesn’t condemn the wealthy for their donations, he simply praises the widow’s modest gift.



Jesus sees us friends. This is good news.

Jesus sees the love we have for our church, our neighbors. The ways we share generously with strangers and friends. The ways that we support those who have fallen on hard times and find themselves in situations in which they have little or no control. Jesus sees and has understanding in all the ways in which we GIVE and physically ARE an offering to God's Kingdom.

We are now in the midst of our annual Stewardship Season here at Faith. We are asking for your intents to share out of your abundance and out of what you have to live on. We are inviting you to be part of God's work here in this congregation and in all the ways that we reach out, support, and lift up our community outside of this building. But what we want is not about extravagance and sparkle. We are asking for your humility, your generosity, and for gifts of the heart.

Sharing what you have with the church is not about getting personal praise or power. It's not about securing your spot in heaven. It's really about discipleship. About your relationship with God. And remembering that Jesus sees you. Right where you are! Even with all the mess that's going on in our world and in our lives – we each have the ability to share for the work of God's kingdom happening right now.

And for that, I am truly thankful. Because this CANNOT be thrown down or destroyed.

Thank you, O Spirit, for your leading of this congregation. Thank you, Lord Jesus – for seeing and knowing our hearts. Thank you, O Father, that we can always trust in you. Amen.