

Proper 12 (17) - July 27, 2025

*Baruch 6:1–7; Psalm 106:1–6, 40–47; Colossians 2:9–14; Luke 21:20 –28

“When it all falls apart”

1. I grew up in a Presbyterian church in Mexico which took passages about the end of times not only pretty seriously, but also pretty literally.
 - a. Maybe not every sermon, but you could definitely call some of the preaching I grew up with as fire and brimstone
 - i. There would be a focus on following God, as you’d expect
 - ii. But there would be also the threat of punishment, of missing out on God’s promises of heaven for all who were obedient
 - iii. As I mentioned in the sermon last week, a heavy use of fear as a motivation for doing the right things
 - b. In our youth group they’d give us these tiny little comic books, translated tracts from the US, whose story lines depicted scenes of the end of the world – and tried to scare you into getting right with God
 - i. Maybe you remember seeing these yourselves.
 - ii. The stories always showed the people who did the right thing eventually got rewarded and the people who did the wrong things eventually got punished
 - iii. There were storylines about Revelation, about Jesus returning for Judgement Day
 - c. I remember church folk speaking and teaching about things on the news as being the very signs predicted in the Bible (earthquakes, famine, war) as a way of saying: this is real, and the time is near, it won’t be long now when Jesus will return
 - i. Pay attention! Jesus said there would be things happening all around us, and that it would be a sign that the end is near
 - ii. So, of course, whenever there were any of these things in the news, you’d be sure to be reminded “the end is near ... repent from your sins!”
 - d. I wonder if similar ideas were shared when other terrible things happened, like the bubonic plague in Europe, or a bad California earthquake, or wars near and far
 - i. There have been, after all, MANY bad things happen throughout history which would be easy to point to
 - ii. I wonder how those who were going to church or reading the Bible in those terrible moments felt it all could apply to them, right then
2. The warnings that Jesus is sharing in this Gospel passage with his followers, viewed in their historical context, offer us a glimpse about the fearful times they must have gone through.
 - a. It’s important to remember that during Jesus’ ministry, the people would have had memories of recent and distant stories told in the Scripture and retold in worship and religious festivals which shaped how they understood history and God’s connection to them

- i. There were formative stories like escaping slavery from Egypt led by Moses, and receiving God’s ten commandments and the rest of the law in the desert
 - ii. There were equally distant stories of the destructive and distressful wars in the land of Palestine throughout their history, of the Jewish people and their neighbors, in relentless cycles of war and peace
 - iii. There were stories of Jewish kings disobeying God, and foreign nations conquering them and taking the Jewish people into slavery once more
 - b. At the time of today’s story, they were once more in the cycle of tension with a foreign oppressor over them
 - i. It was the Roman Empire, which had come on the heels of the Greek Empire who has also conquered them and ruled nearly 200 years
 - ii. Either in their current memory or their distant memory, the Jewish people and neighbors or their ancestors were enduring incredible hardship
 - iii. It didn’t seem to be getting any better, and as always there were some who were trying to fight back, mounting a resistance
 - c. Jesus would have known there were people against him who were keeping track of him (both religious leaders and Roman officials) because he was threatening the balance of power
 - d. He told the crowd that a time was coming when the temple would be destroyed, therefore they would lose their bearings as a people of faith, as a people who lived in the land
 - e. The warnings, the gloom and doom would not have been surprising to some of them back then, considering how tough things were, though maybe Jesus’ prediction about the temple struck a nerve, since the temple had been destroyed once before by the Babylonians centuries earlier, then rebuilt
 - f. But along with the warnings, Jesus told them to trust that God was in control, and to keep alert and aware.
 - g. The hard times coming will feel harder for some than for others, but he called them to make a pledge to get through it together with God’s help.
- 3. Even if we don’t end up reading a 2,000 year old passage literally and trying to shoe-horn its meaning into today’s headlines, something we can do when reading it is to learn from what Jesus was telling them to do when it all falls apart
 - a. A scholar, Professor Troy Troftgruben, writes that the aim of a passage like today’s text for us “is not to predict the future as much as it is to offer a word of hope to encourage faithfulness in the present. Jesus does promise a day when the Son of [Woman] will arrive...” and there will finally be the full establishment of God’s justice. But Jesus’ words are less about a kind of “strategic predicting” and much more about helping them realize “that our faith is not in vain.”
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-advent-3/commentary-on-luke-2125-36-6>
 - b. I would argue that looking for signs which remind us of the terrible things humans can do to each other isn’t the kind of faith angle to have

- i. Yes, there are plenty of terrible things happening, and we can look at one headline at a time with sorrow and anger and ask: How long O Lord before you get us out of this mess?
 - ii. Instead I propose to you that there are also signs we can point to which show people of faith standing firm in spite of all the terrible things
 - iii. We can point to people in our midst
 - 1. Who take a risk being nice to that one kid in school who is bullied
 - 2. Who try to make the world better one act of kindness at a time
 - iv. We can point to people a world away
 - 1. Who help bring food and hope to those trying to survive starvation and war
 - 2. Who refuse to let dictators tear down their country
- c. Jesus didn't teach fear. Jesus taught faithfulness
- i. When it all falls apart, Jesus was reminding them, seek God and support one another, especially those who are the most vulnerable
 - 1. Those who are displaced from their home
 - 2. Children and their parents
 - 3. Those without power who are pushed to the margins
 - ii. "When these things begin, stand up and keep your heads up, because your redemption is drawing near."
 - iii. Be attentive to them, and know that no matter the challenge, God has never been far and will still not be far in the future.
 - iv. Be attentive to how you and I can be instruments of that presence of God in the midst of things falling apart.
 - v. And while Jesus isn't teaching this will be easy or painless, he is saying that in the long view of history, God's justice and mercy prevail
4. It's not the first time things are all falling apart, Jesus says. God was there for us before, and God is here for us now. Stand up and keep your heads up. The way through will become clear.

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