

Pentecost 23C 13 November 2022  
Luke 21:5-19  
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from the ever-present, ever-loving, and everlasting God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*[Jesus] said, '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.... But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.'* Let's pray:...

"Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming; just keep swimming, swimming, swimming ...." Does anyone recognise these words from a much-loved, animated children's movie? The movie is *Finding Nemo* and the character whose mantra is, "Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming" is .... Dory.

Little Nemo, is a clown fish born with an undersized fin and an oversized curiosity. Against his father's warning, Nemo becomes lost after swimming into deep water. Poor, little Nemo faces many dangers and ends up a captive in the salt-water aquarium of a dentist in Sydney. He is terrified and longs for his father's comfort and reassurance. Yet, through all of Nemo's trials, tribulations, and close shaves with death, his faithful companion, Dory, a blue tang fish, encourages Nemo to: "Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming."

Now, before you think the Mental Health First Aid course broke my brain, hear me out and you'll catch my drift (as it were).

Our world is changing, the church is changing, and our lives are changing. Many things that were once familiar and gave us comfort are gone, and many emerging trends and agendas invoke suspicion and fear. There are days when our life is forever changed, the world is different, and nothing is like it used to be. We know those days and we each have our stories. Stories about the loss of a job, loss of independence, declining mobility, death of a loved one, a sudden confronting diagnosis, mental illness, injustice, loss of cultural identity and ties. These are all stories about the day you realised the life you were living wasn't the life you anticipated or want. They're stories of dreams and hopes never realised.

These are the days when the temples of our life and world fall. For some people the Lutheran Church is not the church they remember. It's not like it used to be when they were growing up. Things have changed. For them the temple is falling. Globally, the temple of the economic system is on a knife's edge. Returns on investments are diminishing, house prices are toppling, and inflation is eating away our buying power. The world is awash with wars and insurrections. Nations are rising against nations; kingdoms against kingdoms; religions against religions. There are earthquakes, fires, floods, famines and plagues in various places. Security, peace, and diplomacy have given way to fear, violence, and terrorism. Temples are falling everywhere. In the '70s, the Australian rock band, Skyhooks, made a pointed observation that's just as relevant today with their lyrics: "Horror movie right there on my TV, Shockin' me right outa my brain .... Horror movie, it's the six-thirty news." \*

So, what are we to do about it? "Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming."

We all have temples. Sometimes our temples are people, places, values and beliefs, institutions, dreams. Whatever they might be, they're the things that we think structure and order our lives, give meaning and identity, provide security and stability. At least, that's what we think they do, until they fall.

In today's gospel, some are marvelling at the temple - its beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God. The temple structures their community. It gives identity and meaning. It's the centre of Jewish life. And Jesus looks at it and says, "The days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." But Jesus is referring to more than just the physical temple in Jerusalem. He's including every temple that you and I rely on, and they will fall. Things will change.

So, what do we do on the day our temple falls? "Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming ...."

Change has a way of pushing us into the future. Many people look for signs about the future. What will happen next? What do I do? How can I prepare myself for what's coming? The risk is that we become disoriented, confused, and anxious trying to live in a future we don't yet have. We try to live in a future created in our heads.

Sometimes, after our temple falls, we look for a scapegoat, someone to blame or even demonise. Various groups are blamed for violence in the world and liberal thinkers for division in our Church. Conservatives and liberals attack each other. We look for someone who's not "like us", to target.

Some people will simply give up and walk away in despair. They can see nothing left. All is lost and the situation is hopeless. Some become angry, resentful, and fight back. Some will say this is God's will or maybe even God's punishment. Many will look for easy answers, quick fixes, something that will prop up the old structures and ways of doing things.

None of these are Jesus' responses.

None of this fits with what Jesus is talking about. When Jesus describes things that will happen, he's not asking us to speculate about the future. He's reminding us to be faithful in the present. Be still, be quiet, do not be led astray. Don't allow your life to be controlled or determined by fear. Ignore the many voices that would cause you to turn and follow them. Jesus says, "Endure. Be faithful, be steadfast, persevere here and now." "Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming ...." Jesus calls us to be present and faithful in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. If we can't find God here in our present circumstances, even in the midst of our temple ruins, we won't find God anywhere.

The place of fallen temples is the place in which God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, declares: "For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. 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. 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" (Isaiah 65:17-19).

These promises are fulfilled through our endurance. God is always faithful to his promise, but we too have our part to play, albeit with his help and by his grace. By endurance we gain our lives, our souls. Jesus calls us to persist, endure, be peaceful, stable. We're to remain fully present, faithful, no matter how uncomfortable life may get. When we do this, we discover that God has always been truly with us – in the changes, chances, and chaos of life; in the pain, loss, and disappointment; in the destruction of our temples.

Endurance, perseverance, peacefulness, steadfastness, are the ways in which we acknowledge and trust that God will pick up the fallen stones of our temples and rebuild our lives. Stone by stone God restores the original beauty of our life and world. Stone by stone a new temple arises from the rubble. Stone by stone we become the temple of God. We no longer have temples. We don't need them because we are the temple. That's the story that needs to be told. That's our opportunity to testify.

We need to tell the story of the day our temple was destroyed, and then leave the rubble at Jesus' feet. It's not the end of our story. The greater story is how we discover God next to us in the temple ruins and how, stone by stone, God rebuilds what we can't. It's the ongoing story of God recreating life out of loss and ruin, a story of God rejoicing and delighting in his people.

So, dear friends, "just keep swimming, swimming, swimming ...." "Not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls." "Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming" into Jesus' outstretched arms. Amen.

And the peace of God, which cuts through all fear and misunderstanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus, to life everlasting. Amen.

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*\*Horror Movie*, Song performed by the band "Skyhooks", Songwriter: Gregory J. Macainsh, 1975.

The lyrics may be found at:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=lyrics+to+Horror+Movie+by+Skyhooks&rlz=1C1CHBF\\_en-GBAU765AU765&oq=lyrics+to+Horror+Movie+by+Skyhooks&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i22i29i30l6j33i15i22i29i30.13756j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=lyrics+to+Horror+Movie+by+Skyhooks&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBAU765AU765&oq=lyrics+to+Horror+Movie+by+Skyhooks&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i22i29i30l6j33i15i22i29i30.13756j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8) accessed 09/11/2022.

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