
All Will Be Thrown Down

**A sermon preached on the Day1 radio program
by the Very Rev. Samuel G. Candler**

**Proper 28C
Isaiah 65:17-25
Luke 21:5-19**

*When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned
with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, 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."
(Luke 21:5-6)*

When I was a little boy, nothing was more fun than a big box of blocks and an empty living room floor. I thrilled to see that empty space, just waiting for my next grand castle to be constructed. And so I would begin to build, using the largest and longest blocks first, setting up foundations and imagining the towering structure.

After what seemed like an hour or so, but maybe it was only a half hour, I would have another architectural masterpiece for everyone in the house to adore. "Do you see these great buildings?" At least, my parents said they liked it. Sometimes even my sisters said they liked it. It would be great, until the cat came into the room. Or until my little brother came crawling through.

Then, suddenly, without my even knowing it, one wing of the castle was down, or maybe the whole thing would tumble down. I would be devastated! My day was ruined! Sometimes, by accident, I knocked down the whole thing by myself, which was really embarrassing. And sometimes, I must admit, I would tear it down on purpose. If the building were especially grand, I would plead with my mother to let it stay standing in the middle of the room. Surely, I thought, everyone would want to admire it, even the company coming for dinner that night.

But the buildings never stood for long. Ultimately, not one stone was left upon another. Some way or another, all would be thrown down. The same thing happened when I built roads and houses in the sandbox. The castles would stay for a while there, but the nights and rains would ultimately wash them away. The same thing happened at the beach in the summer time, when I molded grand sand castles. If the tide did not wash away those masterpieces, animals and human beings would crush them.

This morning, besides these verses from Jesus in Luke about the end times, we also hear the great verses from Isaiah that God "is about to create new heavens and a new earth." The Christian Church likes to talk about things being made new. We think that by talking about it enough, maybe we will actually believe it. We love the psalm that says, "Sing to the Lord a new song!" "All things are being made new," Isaiah proclaims in another place. The phrases conjure up images of freshness and vitality.

But how we delude ourselves! I've been around the Church a long time, and let me remind you of something: in the Church we generally do not like new things! Why, it's the new things that are so often the battlegrounds for church political life!

It'd be fine if the Church stuck with replacing only those things which we want replaced. There's always something we want made new. We want new acolyte robes, or new paint in the parish hall. We want the preacher to preach about something new. Sometimes we just want a new priest entirely. But a new sanctuary? Of course not! A new way of praying? No way. Sing to the Lord a new song? No, No, the old ones suit us just fine. The old towers suit us just fine, too.

"All things made new" is one of the most unsettling and downright controversial themes in the Christian Church. Most of us, I daresay every single one of us, whether we are liberal or conservative, whether we are rural or urban, whether we are large church or small church, have some special image of what church and religion means to us. We definitely do not want that to change. That image is what we inwardly long for when we show up Sunday after Sunday for church. That image may be what we think we had some time long ago. And it's that image, more often than not, which prevents us from experiencing God.

A friend of mine once put it well. "Do you want to know what prevents you from experiencing God the most?" he asked. "The biggest obstacle in the way of your experiencing God is whatever your last experience of God was." Your last experience, whatever it was, was so wonderful and refreshing and renewing, that you inevitably believe that every future experience will have to be exactly like that. And it won't be.

New heavens and a new earth don't seem so great when we admire the large stones of the huge temples we build around us. And all of us have some sort of temple that we admire. It might be a literal church. It might be those forts and dams of sand that I fashioned as a child. It might be that special place we escape to for refuge and respite. But that temple might also be our own job, or company, or family, that we have built up to be proud of.

Every one of those temples is one day made new, and we usually don't like to see it fall. I learned the same way most children do that all things are made new. I learned the hard way. I had to lose something. I had to lose something that would make me start paying attention to the world around me. Many of you who have lost things have learned this too. Loss often serves the purpose of making us pay attention, making us observe and notice the truth, sometimes for the first time. Yes, all things are being made new all the time, if we are watching.

All of us, no matter how old we are, all of us, have great buildings around us that will ultimately fall. We don't like to imagine it. We certainly don't like to plan for it. But, ultimately, we know our buildings will fail - for some reason or another. Even if we've managed to keep it up in the living room for several days, we know one day it will be gone.

That's how Jesus reacted when his disciples were admiring the grandeur of the great temple in first century Jerusalem. Apparently, it was, indeed, a tremendous structure, and a suitable symbol of God's greatness and glory.

But Jesus knew it would one day fall. He could not say for sure when it would be; but he knew it would be a cataclysmic event, an awful event. It would seem like the end of the world itself. It would seem like everything his people had ever worked for, would be gone.

However, Jesus also knew that the temple's destruction would not mean the end of God's creation; it would not mean the end of salvation. He urged people to bear suffering with hope and patience. His lesson was that all of us suffer, and all of us go through destruction and tearing down. All of us even go through death, but that is not the end. He died himself, but it was not the end. He was resurrected, and God's creative power began again.

When my boyhood castles fell, I realized that my great joy was actually in the building, in the layout and construction, in the realization of a completed project. For me, the real joy was seeing an empty living room floor and setting about the construction. What fun it is to build! The fun of creation is just that. It is in the creating, not just in the admiring.

Many of us gather today in beautiful structures. Sometimes they are churches, but sometimes they are the other temples of

our lives - companies, families, projects, masterpieces. They are usually wonderful! Look at the large stones!

But these structures -of whatever sort""are not the ultimate focus of our lives; just as churches should not ultimately be the focus in our Christian worship. Jesus was clear, later in his ministry, that when the temple was destroyed, he would build it up in three days. That statement was a puzzle to his disciples until they realized he was talking about the temple of himself, his body, his very identity.

Thus, when the Christian Church gathers and takes communion, we touch something greater than the building or structure. That which is greater is Jesus Christ himself. In the Christian church, we believe that God is actually building a temple greater than our churches and cathedrals. God is actually growing the Body of Christ. When we ask, "Where is Jesus Christ today?" our answer becomes, "The body of Jesus Christ is actually us! The Body of Christ is really the church, us, the community of believers and worshipers and servers!"

It is the same with the other masterpieces of our lives - corporations, families, projects. The critical elements of those temples are not the literal stones, but the living stones of relationship. The people and the relationships are the critical elements. The Body of Christ.

The fun part of the church is not sitting around admiring how pretty it looks or how good we feel. The fun part of church is in building up the body of Christ.

I am sure God enjoys our physical cathedrals and temples and projects of whatever sort. But I believe God loves to build up people and relationships - the body of Christ. God loves our learning and our serving, our hugging and crying and laughing. With all that we do good in life, God is creating with us; and God is having fun with us. God is building us into a living temple, the Body of Christ.

The literal stones will all be thrown down, in some way or another, at some time or another. The spiritual stones will endure.

There may be some signs toward the end. Jesus famously mentions some of them in the gospels. Signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, wars and insurrections, earthquakes. The economy. The Dow Jones Average. All that.

I believe that these signs usually indicate larger cycles of time, cycles that we are not quite aware of yet. Stages of our life end sometimes. We think it is the end of the world. But it is not the end of the entire world. Just the end of that particular stage of our world. We enter a new one.

Sometimes the transition hurts. Changes hurt. But they are signs that the kingdom of God is near, is very near. When you are encountering the anxiety of any change in your life, be assured that you are not far from God in that experience; you are, instead, very near.

People often ask me why the Christian Church exists. One of the reasons I give is that the Church is meant to teach us how to change gracefully. How to change gracefully. The classical ministrations of the church have always been associated with changes in our human lives - inevitable changes that most of us go through. I mean changes like birth, illness, marriage, death. In direct association with those changes, the Christian Church provides baptism, anointing with oil, the sacrament of marriage, a funeral. The Church pronounces blessing and grace during those moments of change, painful or joyous.

At our best, the Church should be teaching us how to change gracefully. Even the changes in Church itself can be occasions for our learning grace

All will be thrown down. Yes, it will. And sometimes we can see the signs of that tumult all too quickly. But that will not be the end. God will be in the change. God will be providing grace even in that change. And all things will be made new.

We don't have to wait for the end times. There can be new life on each day of the year. And there can be judgment each day of the year. God calls both those events the same thing: a new opportunity to know the love of God. God loves us. If there is ending each day, there is also new life each day. If there are things being thrown down, there are also things ready to be

built up. There is a new opportunity for love.

AMEN.

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