

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“Losing Control of Your Life”

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Luke 21:5-28

Jesus is with His disciples at the Temple in Jerusalem. Tensions have escalated. The religious authorities have been questioning and testing Jesus, plotting against Him. This is just days before His death.

As they leave the Temple, they pause to admire its architecture. Indeed, the Temple was beautiful, and built for the ages. One of the quarried stones you can still see in the Western Wall is massive: 45 feet long, 15 feet thick and 11 feet tall. Can you imagine moving something like that without modern machinery? The quality of construction, along with its historical and religious significance, and the walled fortress that Jerusalem was . . . it all suggested this beautiful temple would endure for the ages. But Jesus has disturbing news for His disciples. “The time will come” he says, “when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.” The same zealous energy that was put into its construction will be put into its destruction.

Jesus continues with a frightening vision of the terror and disasters that will accompany the end times. He speaks of things coming, over which we will have no control.

For example, he says many will come in His name, representing Him, yet preaching heresy. It’s happening today with preachers making false promises of wealth and health. We cannot stop that from happening, nor can we stop the crowds from following these wolves in sheep’s clothing.

We will not be able to control the outbreak of wars and tumults that Jesus speaks of. We will not be able to control a great earthquake from happening, or famines and pestilences. We will not be able to control governments that persecute Christians around the world. We will not be able to control the roaring of the seas, or the terrifying signs in the sun, moon and stars.

Jesus is describing a time when we lose the sense of control over our lives. Not one of us likes that feeling, never have.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve wanted to be like God. They wanted to be in control. That urge, that impulse has been passed all the way down through the generations to you and me. We want to be like God too. We want to be in control. Conversely, we do not like the feeling that we are unable to shape our environment or our future. Yet, Jesus speaks of the End Times as a period when we will have very little control over anything.

Even if we’re not talking about the signs of the End Times, so much of life is already outside our control. Can you control the weather for the fall harvest, or for an outdoor wedding? Can you control the flow of traffic in Chicago when you’re trying to get to O’Hare, or whether your flight departs on time? Can you control the results of the medical diagnostic test, or all the side-effects of the chemo, or how long that chemo might be effective? Can you control the war plans of a tyrant who cares nothing about life?

We’re all control freaks at heart because we’re all the offspring of Adam and Eve. But the trouble is we don’t have as much control over our lives as we like to think we do.

Think of the aging process. We cannot stop our skin from thinning and losing its elasticity as we age. We cannot stop our tooth enamel from decaying, as well as our memory and senses. Most of us will eventually lose the strength to pursue the hobbies we love, the license to drive where we want, the capacity to live independently.

In this life and at the end of times, we have very little control. But did you notice in our text how Jesus also comforts us? Jesus offers us glimpses of remarkable protection even amid all the destruction. “When you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified. These things must take place.” The implicit promise is “One way or another, I’ll see you through this. It’ll be ok.” When Jesus speaks of persecution, he says, “This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Make up your minds not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that your adversaries will not be able to resist or contradict” (v. 14).

When Jesus says we will be betrayed, and hated by all, “and some of you will even be put to death”, yet He promises “not a hair of your head will perish” (v. 18). That’s quite a statement! In essence, He’s saying, “You might lose your life, but trust me, it’s going to be ok.”

When Jesus depicts the heavens torn open and the Temple torn down, He tells us to “straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (v. 28). Jesus turns these horrible signs of destruction into signs of salvation. Makes me think of one of our members who told me the ‘Do Not Resuscitate’ band on her wrist was, quote, “a happy reminder that soon she would be home in heaven.”

No matter how terrible the loss of control and destruction, God’s work is never thwarted. When your life takes a turn for the worse, and you are suffering, God calls you to look for Him amid the suffering. There you will find Him doing His work, giving you words to speak, giving you promises to hold onto. When you no longer have control over the circumstances of your life, God still does. Hold on to His promises and live by faith, not by sight.

You know, all the signs are in place. The end could happen any time and we wouldn’t be able to say there were no warning signs. We are immersed in the warning signs: wars, threats of using nuclear weapons, pandemics, weird weather all around, mass random shootings, riots, and the consensus of the masses turning against Christians and persecution on the rise.

It’s all looking more and more like the picture Jesus painted in our Gospel lesson. But only God knows; the end may yet be far off. What we do know for certain, is that Jesus loves us, is always near us, and now also holds all the authority and control in heaven and earth.

It wasn’t always that way. There was a time when Jesus did not have control, chose not to exercise control, so that we might be saved. He emptied Himself and became humble and weak and succumbed to more powerful forces. Jesus lost control. He did not try to control the lies said about Him by false witnesses. He did not resist arrest. He did not silence the crowds shouting, “Crucify him!” He did not interfere with the judgment of Pilate. He did not stay the hands that pounded the nails through His hands. Though He quieted the waves and the demons He did not quiet the mockery as He hung dying. He did not call down legions of angels to attend to Him. He did not ward off death. Jesus lost control. He lost control of his life to save yours. He abdicated control to those who hated Him because He loved you.

Therefore, even when we are losing control over our lives, we can be at peace because we know He is risen and has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father with all authority in heaven and earth. Though we cannot ultimately prevent the decay of our aging bodies, we know the day is approaching when He will “transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body by that power that enables him to subdue all things to himself” (Phil. 3:21). Though we cannot control the war-mongering tyrant, we know no authority exists other than what God has instituted (Rom. 13), and that He can and does restrain wicked men and frustrate their plans, or simply tosses them out with the trash. We cannot control the growing atheism and skepticism and agnosticism in our land, but we know that one day “every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11). To their great humiliation they will no longer be able to deny Him. We cannot control the devil and his angels, but we know even the unclean spirits must obey Him (Mk. 1:27). We cannot control the forces of nature, but Jesus can rebuke the winds and create a great calm (Mk. 4:39). We cannot prevent the seas from roaring, but he still puts limits on them, “Thus far you shall come, but no farther; Here shall your proud waves stop” (Job 38:11). We cannot control signs in sun and moon and stars, but we know the heavens will always declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1).

Being the descendants of Adam and Eve, we want control, like to think we are in control and, and are very disappointed when we lose control. But all the authority in heaven and earth, all the control has been given to Jesus, and He loves us and frees us from the dark forces of sin, death and evil that would overwhelm us.

One last thing. We know animals don’t like being cooped up and restrained any more than we do. They also like control and freedom. Have you ever seen calves released into green pastures in spring? They were born in a barn, have lived in that barn through winter, have eaten nothing but hay and silage, and now are being released into green pastures. Have you ever seen that? They jump and kick it up for joy, they trot around surprisingly light on their feet, a little disoriented but oh so happy. The Lord says that’s how it will be for us when Jesus comes and frees us from the sin that has a hold over us. “You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.” That will be our joy when Jesus returns. That’s what we have to look forward to after those difficult days of having no control. “You who fear my Name . . . will go out leaping like calves from the stall.” Thanks be to God. Amen.