

November 17, 2019 23rd Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Malachi 4:1-2a, Psalm 98
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13, Luke 21:5-19

[With ideas and some phrasing from Working Preacher's Sermon Brainwave for this Sunday,
and Debie Thomas' Journey with Jesus entitled By Your Endurance.]

Grace and peace, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.

It is November and again this week, at the end of the church year,
we hear scripture readings about the end times, Christ's return,
the Little Apocalypse, as it's sometimes called.

Today I want to dig into these passages, especially Luke's gospel,
and then turn our focus to mental health.

In the gospel, Jesus and his disciples have entered into Jerusalem. The cross is near.
And they are talking about the newly completed Jerusalem temple, how ornate and beautiful it is.
The 1st century historian Josephus records as much:

with stones 40 feet long, the temple sat on a platform twice as large as the Roman Forum,
four times as big as the Athenian Acropolis.

From all we know, it was an amazing structure, awe-inspiring even to the disciples.

It's the temple's potential destruction and what they will face that Jesus predicts in today's reading

If that happens, if the temple is destroyed, then what should they hold on to?

Their identity, their faith, is wrapped up in this place, and Jesus is pushing them past that.

Hold on, dear ones, hold on to the promises of God.

If we do the math, we know that Jesus and his disciples would have been having these conversations
around the year 30.

They must have been shaking their heads: Seriously, Jesus?

This tremendous building? Destroyed? That's impossible.

But remember that Luke actually put together his gospel not in the year 30,

but 60 some years later, around the year 90.

By then, the Jerusalem temple did lay in ruins.

By then, Jesus hadn't returned.

They were probably experiencing some persecution, nations were at war.

Luke has the benefit of time and he knows that those who'll read this gospel must be in for the long haul.

Fast forward: now it's 2019.

We know about nation rising again nation.

We know about war and strife, about plagues that science can't control.

What do these passages mean for us?

It's hard to know which signs are from God, and which are just hard days, or hard seasons.

It's tempting to try and plot out the steps to the last days, and plenty hear that message.

It's tempting to try and domesticate holy mystery in buildings, in doctrine and denominations.

But they, too, will crumble.

So how are we to live as people of faith?

The word I hear today from Jesus? It's endurance.

Don't get caught up with the end times, with the signs.

But live faithfully, stand firm, do justice, care for people, endure.

By your endurance, by your holding on, you will gain your souls.

And I should add: This endurance that we so desperately need, it's a gift of the Spirit...

A gift of grace.

How do we live? By our endurance, by our holding on with the Spirit's help.

Some of you know long time Hope member Marilyn Asp.

Marilyn recently moved to Duluth to be nearer her children.

For years it was Marilyn's leadership, that called our congregation to focus on mental health.

Decades ago Marilyn experienced the death of her husband by suicide.

She was witness to this pain.

Her life, her years, are testimony to caring for our own and one another's mental health, mental wellness.

Mental health is a primary focus at the U.

Some of you are leaders in your departments in this work.

And mental health and our struggles with mental health cross the lines, all the lines.

They are painfully real in our families.

They are real in us.

They are part of the conversations you and I share day in and day out:

With Pastor Barbara and our Compassion Care leaders, we ask:

How do we cope? What do we need? Where is God in all of this?

How does our baptism, our identity as God's beloved ones, God's children, buoy us when times are hard?

When stigma and fear could keep us silent,

could squelch our prayer,

could plug our ears,

could limit our acting,

we are called to endurance, to faithful, honest living, to holding on, by the grace of God, holding on.

Mental Health Connect is an interfaith collaboration of 13 congregations in 15 sites,

helping people and their families get connected to mental health services.

This past spring, with Marilyn's pushing, her testimony, our congregation became part of this collaboration.

Sarah Wille and Sarah Tefvesson Doure take the lead, sharing information, keeping mental health before us, for instance, having a table many weeks at the Farmers Markets this summer.

Isha Caldwell is a Mental Health Navigator with Mental Health Connect.

Her role is to help people navigate the mental health system...sometimes that means for themselves, sometimes that means navigating with or for a family member.

Until about 6:55 this morning Isha and I had planned to team up for today's sermon.

I would say about this much and then sit down.

But, she's sick this morning, too sick to be here, and so we agreed that she'd come a different time.

I'd love for you to hear her.

Ann Wagner from our congregation works as a clinical psychologist with veterans and their families.

Hearing that Isha could not speak today, Ann offered to share a few words about mental health.

Thank you, Ann!

People of God, come back again to the focus:

Stand firm, love one another, care as you are able, do justice.

By our endurance, by our holding on with the Spirit's help, we will gain our souls.

Let us pray: We thank you, O God, for creating us, body, mind, and spirit. Give us courage in these challenging days to care well for one another, those around us, and ourselves. Where stigma could isolate, attune our ears for listening and open our hearts to support. In the wideness of emotions, show us again your face, your everlasting love. Grant us, God, the grace to endure all that is before us. Amen.