

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)
Trinity 10
August 8, 2021
Gospel – Luke 19:41-48 (Jesus Wept over Jerusalem)
By Peter Wagner

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. “When Jesus drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!’” So far our text. Jesus teaches in this text that his incarnate presence – made known by his word – is the only thing that makes for peace. Even when he comes violently, his purpose is to obtain and proclaim peace with God for us. Even when he scourged the moneychangers, he did so to drive out evil so the people might listen to his words and know him as the true source of peace.

When Jesus wept over Jerusalem, he wept over the City of Peace, for it would know no peace. Sad irony, for in Hebrew the very name Jerusalem means, “Founded in Peace”. At the time of Abraham, the city was simply called Salem – Shalom – Peace. Melchizedek came out in peace, bringing bread and wine, speaking the benediction of God (Gen 14:18-20). Later, in the time of the Judges, the city was called Jebus, meaning “trampled,” or “tread down,” because God’s presence was no longer there for peace. The pagan Jebusites trusted in a false peace; they taunted David that even the blind and lame could defend its ramparts. Yet David captured it, restored its name of peace, and made Jerusalem his capital (2 Sam 5:6-10). Thus began an era of peace, for God’s presence came to dwell in the city, enthroned in the cloud above the mercy seat. Under Solomon, God gave Jerusalem peace on every side (1 Kings 5:4). On his coronation day, Solomon rode into the city not on a warhorse, but on a mule, a symbol of peace (1 Kings 1:38). In his time the temple was established, where God promised his holy presence would dwell eternally, the presence of God that makes for peace.

But in the centuries that followed, Jerusalem welcomed false prophets who proclaimed, “Peace, peace!” “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!” (Jer 6:14, 7:4). They supposed that since they had the temple, they were entitled to peace. Yet they did not live in the peace of God. They did not execute justice for the oppressed, the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow. They shed innocent blood in the temple itself (Jer 22:3, Matt 23:35). They continued to steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, and worship other gods. They lived in unrepentance, refusing to amend their ways. And still they regularly appeared before God in the temple with unbelievable nerve, saying “We are delivered,” only to go on doing all these abominations! Therefore they made God’s house, the house bearing God’s name of peace, into a den of robbers (Jer 7:1-11).

Even so, as many times as Jerusalem rebelled, God patiently sent his prophets to call her back to peace. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings” (Luke 13:34). But she was not willing. Therefore God’s face no longer shone upon her. It burned against her in hot wrath. Jerusalem knew no peace, but siege and slaughter. She went into exile in Babylon because of her unrepentance. She knew utter destruction of the temple, so that not one stone remained upon another. In an awful prediction, Jeremiah wrote, “And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and their daughters, and everyone shall eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress, with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them” (Jer 19:9).

Even so, the love of God still extended to the city that stoned its prophets. In his love, he heard their cry of distress and restored them from exile. In his love, he became Man for the sake of the city that never lived up to its name. Unto her was born the Prince of Peace. Christ gazed on his beloved city and wept in heartfelt pity and love. He earnestly desired her salvation, he longed for her to come to knowledge of righteousness though faith (Rom 10:1-4).

Today’s gospel text immediately follows Luke’s account of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, when the multitude of disciples rejoiced and praised God, shouting, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Lk 19:38). Yet Jerusalem rejected her Prince of Peace. She wanted a warhorse, not a lowly donkey. Instead of bearing fruit in keeping with repentance, she sought to kill the Son of God. So Jesus wept over her, for she did not know the hour of her visitation. He wept because he foresaw her coming slaughter and destruction. He wept because apart from him, she could have no peace. She

would know siege and fire and intense starvation. When the Romans besieged Jerusalem in 70 AD, Josephus tells us the famine was so severe that a mother ate her own baby out of desperation.¹ And Jerusalem would know utter destruction of the temple. Not one stone would remain upon another, because the city founded in peace had rejected the cornerstone of her foundation.

Are we any better than the Jerusalem which rejected Jeremiah? Are we any better than the Jerusalem which rejected Christ? Though we bear the name of Jesus, though we worship in God's house, we continue to daily steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, and worship other gods. For to covet is to steal. To speak against our brother is to murder. To look upon a woman with lust is to commit adultery. To swear needlessly is to take God's name in vain. And to be anxious about our daily needs is to idolatrously mistrust God's providential care (Matt 5-6). Yet despite our sinful ways, we weekly appear before God's presence in this sanctuary, this church, with unbelievable nerve. We receive holy absolution, only to go on doing all these abominations! Do we therefore make God's house, this house of prayer, into a den of robbers?

Even so, God's love extends even to us. In his love he sent his incarnate Son to suffer violence, so that you might be at peace with him. While you were his enemies, Christ died to purchase your reconciliation (Rom 5:10). By his violent suffering, by his mocking and scourging, by the nails pounded through his hands and feet, by the crown of thorns thrust into his scalp, by the spear in his side and the blood streaming out, he made peace with God for you.

Upon this foundation and cornerstone, upon his crucifixion and resurrection, Christ now builds a new temple: the Church, the new Jerusalem. Here he brings you to repentance, forgives, and restores you. Here the Spirit bears fruit of repentance in you, delivering you from wrath. Therefore your nerve to appear weekly before him with sin-stained hands is not the unbelievable nerve of unrepentance, but the righteous nerve of faith. You trust Jesus' own invitation and promised absolution, casting yourselves on his mercy. Believing in him, you are not put to shame (Rom 9:33). You receive his incarnate presence, recognizing the hour of his visitation. That hour is now, Christ is bodily present here with his peace. He is present in his word and sacrament, bringing the comfort of forgiveness. This is the peace of God which passes all understanding. In him the peace of the Lord is with you always.

And you know all these wonderful things in the same way that the people in the temple knew them – by hearing Jesus' words. Because they hung on to every word of his teaching in the temple, the chief priests and scribes and leaders could not find a way to destroy him. So the words of Jesus bring peace, the words of Jesus cast out violence. You hear his words when you hear the prophets in this place, when you hear his preachers proclaiming this hour of visitation, calling you to trust in him.

But why don't we see peace on earth? Why is the church divided for confessing faithfully? Why did Jesus say that he would divide mother against daughter, father against son (Luke 12:53)? Why did he say that those who bear his name must suffer cross and tribulation (Luke 9:23-24)? All these trials drive us back to the words of Jesus as our only comfort. Remember that Jesus came in violence so that we might have peace. In the temple, he came with a cleansing whip. He scourged the moneychangers and cast them out, just as he cast out demons by his powerful word. But he cast out the moneychangers so that the people might listen to him. He cast out evil spirits to make room for the Holy Spirit. In the same way, through trials, he casts out evil from your hearts, cleansing you so that you might cling to his precious words. He has promised, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27). Hold on to this promise. Trust that the violence and suffering you endure in this life are meant for peace. By it, Christ cleanses your hearts, brings you to repentance, and teaches you to trust in him.

In the City of Peace, they did not know the thing that makes for peace. But here in the Church, true peace with God is made known to you. Purchased by his blood, you are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. Now you may depart in peace, as we sing in the liturgy after the Sacrament. For your eyes have seen his salvation, the light of the Gentiles has revealed himself to you (Luke 2:28-32). As the new Jerusalem, we are comforted by the presence of Jesus. Through toil and tribulation and tumult of her war, we wait the consummation of peace forevermore.²

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

¹ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Bk VI, Ch 3, Sec 4

² LSB 644, The Church's One Foundation